

**WELFARE IS WORK: SOCIAL WELFARE, MIGRATION, AND WOMEN'S
ACTIVISM IN PUERTO RICAN COMMUNITIES SINCE 1917**

by

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Salvador Amador and Deborah Reger

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ABSTRACT

**Welfare is Work: Social Welfare, Migration, and Women's Activism in
Puerto Rican Communities after 1917**

by

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Chairs: Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof and Richard Turits

This dissertation tells the history of welfare and social work in Puerto Rico, rethinking the ideologies, politics, and practices of the colonial relationship to the United States through a close examination of the ways that Puerto Ricans negotiated their inclusion into federal public assistance programs. Congress granted nominal citizenship to natives of Puerto Rico in 1917, but the continued territorial status of the island restricted the terms of this citizenship. Puerto Ricans had limited political rights, and as the federal government began to expand in the 1930s, it only partially extended social welfare policies to the territories, inscribing colonial differences in the emerging welfare state. Puerto Ricans responded by organizing and demanding access to social welfare provisions, including child welfare funds, veterans benefits, and old-age assistance. I argue that these debates over the right to welfare, and social practices of public assistance, were fundamentally transnational, because both social workers and clients

moved extensively to and from the US mainland, and because advocates and policy makers saw the question of welfare as inseparable from the issue of migration.

While the extension of welfare to Puerto Rico has long been recognized as central to the history of U.S. colonial rule on the island, the history of welfare in Puerto Rico and among Puerto Ricans in the U.S. has generally escaped extensive treatment in Puerto Rican and U.S. scholarship. Ideas about Puerto Rican welfare “dependency” have been wrongly linked to assumptions about the pathology – and lack of support for independence – of the poor. Arguably, welfare and the class, racial, national, and gender ideologies that it reproduced and reconsolidated are the single most important story about the U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico and about the displacement of Puerto Ricans to the mainland United States in the 20th century. My project investigates how social welfare programs, and ideas about social rights, actually came into being and how policy makers, activists, and clients participated in shaping their formation and meaning. It reframes Puerto Rican history around women – clients, social workers, and advocates – offering a new way to understand the evolution of a “colonial citizenship.”

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation tells the transnational and colonial history of welfare in Puerto Rico. The U.S. Congress granted nominal U.S. citizenship to residents of Puerto Rico in 1917, but the continued territorial status of the island restricted the terms of this citizenship. Puerto Ricans had could elect a legislature but their governor was appointed by the President. They could not participate in federal elections, for Congress or President. This left many Puerto Ricans dissatisfied, advocating for either full integration into the United States, or full independence. During the New Deal the federal government only partially extended social welfare policies to Puerto Rico and other territories, inscribing colonial differences in the emerging welfare state. Drawing upon the archives of social welfare programs in Puerto Rico and the United States, this dissertation describes the ways that Puerto Ricans negotiated their inclusion into U.S. social welfare programs. I argue that, despite the lack of rights and representation afforded Puerto Ricans as territorial citizens of the United States, debates over the extension of social policy to the territories opened up a space for Puerto Ricans' to advocate for the extension of social rights to the island.¹ The renegotiation of the

¹ One notable exception is sociologist Marietta Morrissey has written about the history of the extension of social welfare policy to Puerto Rico. See Marietta Morrissey, "The Making of a Colonial Welfare State US Social Insurance and Public Assistance in Puerto Rico," *Latin American Perspectives* 33, no.1 (2006): 23-41. The Puerto Rican government also commissioned a study of the differential payments made to Puerto

political status on the island in the 1940s led to local elections for governor, the devolution of some aspects of governance, and the creation of many symbolic institutions of autonomy. Yet Puerto Ricans remained disenfranchised, without federal political representation or guarantees to many basic rights of citizenship. I show how changes in access to social programs became a central part of the negotiation over the terms of integration into the United States, and fundamentally transformed the ways that they lived and worked. By 1970, nearly 70 percent of Puerto Ricans had enrolled in public assistance programs. As this dissertation argues, the administration of welfare programs forged the ways that Puerto Ricans experienced their colonialism and territorial citizenship and shaped how they organized politically.

The story I tell about the history of social welfare centers on the lives and work of Puerto Rican social workers who managed welfare programs together with the working class Puerto Rican citizens who were their clients. Puerto Rican women, though often excluded from view in discussions about the renegotiation of political status, were at the center of this history. My thesis focuses on the overlooked legacy of their transnational organizing and activism in adapting social rights to colonial and migrant contexts. By examining the records of welfare offices where clients claimed benefits along with the personal archives and writings of social workers who lobbied the U.S. Congress for Puerto Rico's inclusion in social policies, this dissertation highlights the central role women activists played in building the welfare state and expanding colonial citizenship to

Ricans under these programs. See José Cabranes, *A Study of Federal Public Assistance Payments to Puerto Rico* (Washington, D.C.: The Office, 1974).

include social rights.²³ Social workers petitioned for access to social welfare provisions, including health care, child welfare funds, veterans benefits, and old age assistance. I follow these women as they emerged as the architects, managers, and proponents of the development of welfare policy on the island. In so doing, I also trace the emergence and transformation of colonial variants of social welfare policy through legislative moments in which Puerto Rican citizens and reformers challenged Puerto Rico's exclusion from federal policy. In each of these moments, Puerto Rico was initially omitted from coverage under new benefits of social legislation and later was gradually or partially included after the work of coalitions of Puerto Rican and United States reformers who advocated for the expansion of territorial citizenship.

In each instance, the growing importance of Puerto Rican migration too and from the United States played a decisive role in arguments about the expansion of welfare. I follow social workers to the United States for training, where time and again they were assigned to attend to and research the needs of Puerto Rican clients living nearby to their universities. Then, during the mass migration of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. after World War II, I map the ways that these social workers helped to a new social welfare bureaucracy that linked offices in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Time and again the mobility of social workers and their efforts on behalf of Puerto Rican migrants highlighted, for

² Scholars investigating women and gender in Puerto Rico have suggested the need for more studies of the history of Puerto Rican women in building state institutions in the twentieth century. See, for example, Blanca G. Silvestrini, *Women and Resistance: Herstory in Contemporary Caribbean History* (University of the West Indies, 1990). Mary Frances Gallart, "Political Empowerment of Puerto Rican Women, 1952-1956," in *Puerto Rican Women's History: New Perspectives*, eds. Félix V. Matos Rodríguez and Linda C. Delgado (New Perspectives. M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

³ On the history of social work in Puerto Rico, social work historian Nilsa Burgos Ortíz published a path-breaking study of social workers that suggests some of the central ways that social workers participated in debates over Puerto Rican citizenship. Nilsa Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras de la profesión de trabajo social en Puerto Rico* (Hato Rey, P.R.: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 1997).

them, one of the central tensions of the legal framework of citizenship in Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans lacked political rights and access to the federal welfare state as long as they remained in the unincorporated territory. Once they moved to the mainland United States, which as citizens they were free to do, they had stronger claims to citizenship rights and social benefits (though these claims were not always respected). I argue that as Puerto Rican social workers worked to adapt state programs and casework practice to the mobile and transnational experiences of Puerto Rican families, they became adept at mobilizing political support around gap between the social rights Puerto Ricans enjoyed as migrants and the rights denied them in Puerto Rico. Many later turned to new ways of working within and beyond the state for social justice, such as through community organizing.

While the extension of welfare to Puerto Rico has long been recognized as central to the history of U.S. colonialism on the island, the history of social welfare in Puerto Rico and among Puerto Ricans in the United States has generally escaped careful scrutiny in both Puerto Rican and U.S. scholarship.⁴ Literature on Puerto Rican history has documented how from the first moments of U.S. intervention discourses of Puerto Ricans' racial inferiority served as justifications for the idea that Puerto Ricans' were undeserving of full citizenship rights and incorporation. This literature has also shown how, in turn, racial and sexual discourses were used to normalize the idea that both Puerto Ricans on the island and migrants in the United States were a "drain" on the U.S.

⁴ Marietta Morrissey, "The Making of a Colonial Welfare State: US Social Insurance and Public Assistance in Puerto Rico." *Latin American Perspectives* 33.1 (2006): 23-41. The Puerto Rican government also commissioned a study of the differential payments made to Puerto Ricans under these programs: José Cabranes, *A Study of Federal Public Assistance Payments to Puerto Rico* (Washington, D.C.: The Office, 1974).

resources.⁵ It has also documented how Puerto Rican migrants faced racial discrimination framed around the understanding that they were migrating for relief. And yet when they tried to claim their rights as United States citizens, such as social rights and benefits, they were often excluded and marginalized.⁶ These racist ideas have resurfaced in popular narratives and political discourse that describe Puerto Rican “dependency” as the result of the pathology of the poor that has in turn sapped support for the independence movement among working class and poor Puerto Ricans. However, despite the centrality of welfare to narratives about Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, there has been little research on the history of welfare in Puerto Rico and among Puerto Ricans in the United States. My project responds to this gap in the literature by investigating how social welfare programs in Puerto Rico actually came into being and how policy makers, activists, and clients participated in their formation.

Background: The U.S. Colonization of Puerto Rico and the Limits of “Territorial” U.S. Citizenship

Since 1898 Puerto Rico has been in a colonial relationship with the United States that has afforded its population limited self-government and no voice in the government of the United States. This colonial arrangement began during the Spanish-American-Cuban War when the United States invaded and occupied ceded Puerto Rico. In 1898,

⁵ See, for example, Laura Briggs, “La Vida, Moynihan, and other libels: Migration, social science, and the making of the Puerto Rican welfare queen.” *Centro Journal* 14, no. 1 (2002): 75-101.

⁶ See for example: Lorrin Thomas, ““How They Ignore Our Rights as American Citizens”: Puerto Rican Migrants and the Politics of Citizenship in the New Deal Era.” *Latino Studies* 2, no. 2 (2004): 140-159.

Spain ceded the island, along with the Philippines, and Guam.⁷ The occupying forces established a military government and over the next three years a series of U.S. appointed military Governors managed the island. United States officials explained the takeover of Puerto Rico, to constituents in the US and to Puerto Ricans, by describing the legacy of Spanish rule as chaotic and backwards and the local population as racially inferior to that of the United States. Puerto Rico needed, the argument went, of the tutelage of the United States government before being able to exercise its own sovereignty. Some Puerto Ricans hoped that the territory might eventually become a full part of the United States. However a strong anti-imperialist strain in US politics, often couched the racist desire to exclude non-white populations from incorporation, led the U.S.⁸ Congress to shy away from annexing the island and incorporating it into the U.S. as a new state.

Instead, in 1900 the United States formalized its colonial relationship with Puerto Rico with the passing of the Foraker Act, which established a civilian government that was composed of an appointed United States governor and a locally elected legislature. The Foraker Act also clearly outlined that the U.S. government had the right to apply U.S. laws and policies at its own discretion without affording Puerto Rican's voting representation in the U.S. Congress.⁹ Instead, Puerto Ricans would have a symbolic and non-voting representative in the U.S. Congress with the title of "Resident

⁷ Alfred McCoy and Francisco Antonio Scarano, *Colonial Crucible* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

⁸ Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall, *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁹ For more on the construction of Puerto Rican citizenship during this period see: Sam Erman "Meanings of Citizenship in the U.S. Empire: Puerto Rico, Isabel Gonzalez, and the Supreme Court, 1898 to 1905" *Journal of American Ethnic History*.27, no. 4 (2008): 5-33. Samuel C. Erman, "Puerto Rico and the Promise of United States Citizenship: Struggles around Status in a New Empire, 1898-1917." PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2010.

Commissioner.” Moreover, the U.S. government also clarified that the island’s residents were “Puerto Rican citizens” not United States citizens despite living in a U.S. territory. Shortly afterwards in 1901, the U.S. Supreme Court case *Downes v. Bidwell* further clarified the exclusion of Puerto Ricans from U.S. citizenship by delineating that, unlike other territories that had been incorporated as states, Puerto Rico was a “non-incorporated territory,” a status that meant it would remain a possession without being annexed. This distinction marked the island as “foreign in a domestic sense,” a territory of the U.S., under the legislative oversight of the U.S. Congress, but whose people were not afforded the entitlements or benefits of U.S. citizenship.¹⁰

After 1901 the Puerto Rican civilian government, composed of both United States officials and local Puerto Rican representatives, began an expansive process of colonial state building. The Puerto Rican colonial administrators paid particular attention to the development of a new public education system, which they imagined as a benevolent institution that would transform the island and its people through “Americanization.”¹¹ Among other things “Americanization” was defined by colonial administrators as an educational agenda that would impart United States values through training in the English language, “Anglo-Saxon” and “Christian” culture and morality, education in U.S. history and politics, and vocational training that would prepare Puerto Rican’s for incorporation within the U.S. managed capitalist economy. The first step in the creation of this new educational system was the colonial government’s recruitment and training of hundreds

¹⁰ Burnett and Marshall. *Foreign in a Domestic Sense*.

¹¹For more on Americanization see :Aida Negrón de Montilla, *Americanization in Puerto Rico and the Public-School System, 1900-1930*. (Rio Piedras, P.R: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1975). José-Manuel Navarro, *Creating Tropical Yankees: Social Science Textbooks and U.S. Ideological Control in Puerto Rico, 1898-1908* (New York: Rutledge, 2002).

of teachers, the majority of whom were women from the United States and Puerto Rico. The large influx of Puerto Ricans into these educational initiatives marked a drastic transformation in the role of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. colonial project and propelled forward the development of robust island wide colonial state institutions.¹²

United States colonial state building in Puerto Rico went hand in hand with the expansion of United States capital, which led to the consolidation of the majority of the island's sugar industry under a few U.S. owned sugar trusts. The move from local ownership of sugar and small farming to economic system dominated by U.S. sugar production resulted in the expansion of waged labor and the emergence of a extractive economy whereby the large majority of sugar profits from the island were directly paid to U.S. stockholders.¹³ On the island the impact of the growth of U.S.-owned trusts had the immediate result of consolidating land previously used for subsistence agriculture into the hands of U.S. corporations, despite unenforced laws that formally restricted corporations to possession of less than 500 acres. The result of this land consolidation was devastating for the rural populations that were displaced and who were unable to maintain patterns of subsistence activities that helped support their communities. These workers immediately began to migrate from rural areas towards urban centers in search of work.¹⁴

¹² Solsiree del Moral, *Negotiating Empire: The Cultural Politics of Schools in Puerto Rico, 1898-1952* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013),

¹³ James L. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986). Sidney Mintz. *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

¹⁴ Kelvin A. Santiago- Valles, *"Subject People" and Colonial Discourses: Economic Transformation and Social Disorder in Puerto Rico, 1898-1947* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). Rosa E. Carrasquillo, *Our Landless Patria Marginal Citizenship and Race in Caguas, Puerto Rico, 1880-1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

The economic changes wrought under the first years of the U.S. colonial administration resulted in an increased disaffection among Puerto Ricans with the United States management and the economic extraction of profit from the island. This growing discontent with U.S. rule manifest both within the working class as well as among many elite Puerto Ricans who felt that the U.S. intervention had not profited either group. This frustration continued when subsequent U.S. Supreme Court mandates composing the *insular cases* adjudicated that the U.S. would continue to hold Puerto Rico as a territory rather than annexing the island as initially promised.¹⁵ Many Puerto Ricans were severely disappointed with these exclusions and responded by developing a variety of political coalitions that lobbied for full incorporation, while others demanded independence. Puerto Rican politicians, barred from representation in the U.S. Congress, sought to influence U.S. politicians to advocate on their behalf. The results of this political organization disappointed both groups, when rather than making a definitive decision about Puerto Rico's status, the U.S. government decided to continue holding the island as a territory.¹⁶

In 1917 Congress granted Puerto Ricans the status of "United States citizens" with the signing of the Jones-Shafroth Act. However, this version of U.S. citizenship was restricted by Puerto Rico's status as a non-incorporated territory. Puerto Ricans remained without voting representation in the U.S. Congress or entitlement to the rights mandated to U.S. citizens living in the mainland. Despite these restrictions the 1917 granting of U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans was heralded by some as a decisive step in the direction

¹⁵ César J Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Burnett and Marshall, *Foreign in a Domestic Sense*.

of permanent incorporation and full citizenship rights. Shortly afterwards the U.S. drafted Puerto Rican men into the U.S. military to serve in World War I, which was viewed by many as an immediate moment of both symbolic and concrete incorporation of Puerto Ricans into the U.S. national body. However, the territorial differences inherent to Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship were further inscribed in 1922 with the U.S. Supreme court case *Balzac v. People of Porto Rico*. In this ruling the U.S. officially determined that Puerto Rico was not covered by the Constitution of the United States and that in turn, the Bill of Rights did not apply to the people of Puerto Rico.¹⁷ Puerto Ricans were citizens in name but this citizenship lacked political substance. This ruling was a blow to Puerto Ricans who hoped that the island was going to eventually be incorporated into the U.S. as well as those that sought independence. The period following the *Balzac* were also marked by increasing political mobilization demanding the state to address economic inequality, political repression and Puerto Ricans lack of political representation. Growing numbers of Puerto Rican citizens participated in labor organizing, joined the Socialist Party, and worked to reform the colonial and capitalist relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. At the same time, anti-colonial sentiment grew among Puerto Ricans and the nationalist and pro-independence leader Pedro Albizu Campos led a growing coalition of supporters.

During the same period a growing, while still small, diaspora of Puerto Rican migrants in the United States began to form.¹⁸ One of the particularities of U.S. territorial

¹⁷ Burnett and Marshall, *Foreign in a Domestic Sense*.

¹⁸ Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island & in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

citizenship was that while it had not afforded Puerto Ricans on the island equal citizenship to those in the U.S., it did allow Puerto Ricans to migrate to the United States without being subject to immigration restrictions. Moreover, when Puerto Ricans migrated to the U.S. they formally had access to full citizenship rights while living in the United States. However, when Puerto Ricans arrived in the U.S. they discovered that these rights that were often curtailed locally by systems of racial discrimination already in place that restricted access to those considered non-white. Despite facing racist restrictions to their U.S. citizenship, Puerto Rican migrants did have access to a broader range of citizenship rights, which created an inequality in the value of citizenship rooted in location. When living in the U.S. Puerto Ricans legally had voting representation in U.S. Congress and access to the rights and services allocated to all mainland citizens. Over time, the Puerto Rican migrant population, mobilizing the fuller citizenship rights available to them in the U.S., would begin attempting to exert influence on U.S. politics in ways unavailable to them on the island.¹⁹

Changes in the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States brewed during the transformative years after the Great Depression. During the 1930s a set of New Deal social policies meant to alleviate the impacts of the Depression were partially extended to Puerto Rico at the same time that widespread discontent with and social uprisings against the U.S. administration and U.S. corporations spread.²⁰ The

¹⁹ Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), Virginia Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1917-1948* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1983),

²⁰ Thomas Mathews, *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960). Manuel R. Rodríguez, *A New Deal for the Tropics: Puerto Rico During the Depression Era, 1932-1935* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010). Kelvin Santiago-Valles, *"Subject People" and Colonial Discourses Economic Transformation and Social Disorder in Puerto Rico, 1898-1947* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

expansion of these social programs, paired with a developmentalist discourse, resulted in growing support for continued economic and social reform. In 1938 a new populist party, the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD), garnered increasing support and consolidated its power when its charismatic leader, Luis Muñoz Marín was elected leader of the Puerto Rican Senate in 1940. PPD leaders worked in collaboration with liberal U.S. reformers and New Deal policy makers, including the last appointed U.S. Governor, Rexford Tugwell, to revise the economic and political relationship between Puerto Rico and the U.S. The PPD promised a populist transformation in Puerto Rico through economic and social reform that would regulate U.S. sugar trusts and redistribute land to the working class.²¹ It also later denounced the need for political independence and promoted a continued, but reformed, consensual union between the U.S and Puerto Rico.

The formal reworking of Puerto Rican status under the PPD began in 1948 when Puerto Rico was allowed by the U.S. Congress to elect its own Governor and the population chose PPD leader Marín. In the same year the Puerto Rican government developed an ambitious industrialization program known as *Operacion Manos a la Obra* or “Operation Bootstrap” that encouraged U.S. corporations to build factories on the island by providing economic incentives that included tax breaks and access to a cheap and comparatively well educated labor force. The immediate result of the program was the mass movement of rural Puerto Ricans into the industrial labor force, continued urbanization of the island, internal migration, and emigration. From the start Puerto Rican and U.S. administrators of Operation Bootstrap described the program as making Puerto

²¹ Ismael García-Colón, *Land Reform in Puerto Rico: Modernizing the Colonial State, 1941-1969* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).

Rico as “showcase” of United States democracy and the benefits of corporate sponsored industrialization and development by invitation.

The culmination of the economic and political changes under PPD leadership resulted in the 1952 creation of the *Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico* (ELA) or the Free Associated State of Puerto Rico. Effectively, the development of the *Estado Libre Asociado* defined Puerto Rico as a “Commonwealth”, whose change in status was meant to appease concerns about the continuation of the island’s colonial status during a period when the decolonization of European colonial possessions was demanded globally. Some heralded this change as a “peaceful revolution” or a transformation of Puerto Rico’s political status that illustrated the superiority of Puerto Rican and U.S. handling of decolonization.²² Opponents argued that as an *Estado Libre Asociado* the island legally remained a colony of the U.S. because of the continuation of U.S. Congressional oversight, lack of coverage under the U.S. Constitution or Bill of Rights, and therefore, the limited and contingent variant of territorial citizenship held by Puerto Ricans. Despite protests, in 1953 the General Assembly of the United Nations, decided that Puerto Rico would no longer be considered a colonial possession because it determined that the island met the standards of self-government outlined in its own agenda.²³ However, Puerto Ricans across the political spectrum (among them supporters of statehood, continued affiliation, or independence) remained frustrated by the lack of full representation and citizenship provided to the ELA.

²² Ramon Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

²³ José Trias Monge, *Puerto Rico: The Trials of the Oldest Colony in the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

The creation of Operation Bootstrap and the ELA was accompanied by a host of other state sponsored programs that sought to reduce unemployment on the island and transform society. Foremost among these programs was a state sponsored project of population control that encouraged eugenic policies including the widespread use of sterilization as birth control²⁴. In addition the Puerto Rican government also supported the recruitment of Puerto Rican workers to the United States, a process that had occurred since U.S. intervention, but which became a state sponsored initiative under the ELA. The Puerto Rican government also expanded its presence in the United States, which had begun with the creation of a Puerto Rican Identification and Employment Bureau in 1930 that helped Puerto Rican migrant workers, and that was expanded in 1948 into Bureau of Employment and Migration before becoming the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor in 1951.²⁵ The Migration Division worked both to sponsor and direct Puerto Rican labor migration as well as to work on behalf of Puerto Rican migrants who faced racist and xenophobic exclusions from exercising their United States citizenship. States sponsored migration and the subsequent migration of larger groups of migrants to the U.S. had a dramatic effect on Puerto Rican communities as over the next fifty years nearly half the island's population relocated to the United States. Through these changes Puerto Rico became a transnational community, with a population rooted in both Puerto Rico and the United States that increasingly circulated between both locations.

²⁴ Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

²⁵ Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*, Jorge Duany, *Blurred Borders Transnational Migration between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

Though evolving significantly between 1917 and the present, the U.S. territorial citizenship of Puerto Ricans has remained unequal to U.S. mainland citizenship because the U.S. Constitution or Bill of Rights does not legally cover Puerto Rico. The application of laws and legislation has remained contingent upon decisions made by the U.S. Congress within which Puerto Rico has no voting representation. Therefore, discussions of Puerto Ricans' "citizenship rights" are complex, because Puerto Ricans on the island are not formally entitled to the rights of U.S. citizenship but are rather included under legislation based on separate and contingent decisions made by the U.S. government. However, despite these restriction, the granting of symbolic U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans has nonetheless has had the effect of opening up a discursive space for Puerto Ricans to make political claims and arguments to the rights and benefits of mainland U.S. citizenship. Beginning in 1917 with the granting of this citizenship, Puerto Ricans on the island have continuously lobbied and argued for access to protection, coverage, and "rights" as "U.S. citizens."²⁶ Moreover, in a parallel and sometimes overlapping struggle to lay claim to U.S. citizenship rights, Puerto Rican migrants in the U.S., who *are* legally entitled to full citizenship rights have also fought for access to these rights and benefits because of racial exclusions they faced in U.S. communities. Thus, these struggles over the meaning and content of Puerto Rican's U.S. citizenship have occurred on the island, in the United States, as well as within the transnational construction of Puerto Rican communities.

²⁶ Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*.

Social Welfare in Puerto Rico: Histories of Gender, Women and the State

My work investigates how our understanding of the evolution of citizenship status changes if we take gender into account. This history of social welfare in Puerto Rico builds upon a long and rich literature in Puerto Rican history that has explored the centrality of gender ideology to the development of the U.S. managed colonial government in Puerto Rico. Historians have explored the ways that gender has shaped the formation of state policies and impacted Puerto Rican lives in the formative moments after U.S. intervention, arguing that within the “close encounter of empire” that resulted from these imperial interventions and state building projects discourses about race, gender and sex manifest as justifications for colonial rule. This scholarship has shown how ideas about gender and race were reworked in the period after United States intervention and revealed how U.S. imperialism in Puerto Rico was predicated on understandings of Puerto Rican as racial inferior that were inherently sexualized.²⁷ These studies have also highlighted the formation of colonial institutions and the new relationships engendered by them in Puerto Rican communities as places to explore the intimate history of empire and the central role that women and gender played in managing imperial expansion.²⁸

Investigations of Puerto Rican history have also explored the ways that gender impacted the transformation of the workforce in Puerto Rico over the course of the

²⁷ Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*. Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

²⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). James Midgley and David Piachaud. *Colonialism and Welfare: Social Policy and the British Imperial Legacy* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2011).

twentieth century, resulting in the massive incorporation of women in the labor force and resulting in changes in the definition of gendered roles and relationships in Puerto Rican society.²⁹ Feminist scholarship on Puerto Rican history has served to document the central role of women in Puerto Rican society as well as the creation of specific forms of gendered divisions of labor within Puerto Rican labor history.³⁰ For example, literature on Puerto Rican women's work for United States owned needlework companies in Puerto Rico has illuminated the ways in Puerto Rican society was transformed by Puerto Rican women's mass inclusion within new imperial and capitalist systems of wage labor.³¹ This scholarship highlighted in particular women's concurrent political organizing and activism within labor, socialist and anarchist movements. Literature in Puerto Rican labor history has also been particularly attentive to developing transnational frames of analysis because of the history of the colonial development of economies on the island as well as the constant flow of labor migrations between the United States and Puerto Rico since United States intervention. This scholarship has explored the ways in which transnational networks have shaped the working lives of Puerto Rican women after United States intervention.³² Studies of Puerto Rican labor migration have disrupted the boundaries

²⁹ For an overview of some of this literature see: Alice E. Colon Warren, "Puerto Rico: Feminism and Feminist Studies," *Gender & Society* 17 (2003): 664-690. Altagracia Ortiz, ed., *Puerto Rican Women and Work: Bridges in Transnational Labor* (Temple University Press, 1996). Felix V. Matos Rodriguez ed., *Puerto Rican Women's History: New Perspectives* (M.E. Sharpe, 1998). Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Temple University Press, 2001).

³⁰ Edna Acosta-Belén, ed., *The Puerto Rican Woman: Perspectives on Culture, History and Society* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

³¹ María del Carmen Baerga, ed., *Genero y trabajo: la industria de la aguja en Puerto Rico y el Caribe hispanico* (El Editorial, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1993).

³² Altagracia Ortiz. *Puerto Rican Women and Work: Bridges in Transnational Labor* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996). Félix V., Matos Rodríguez and Linda C. Delgado, *Puerto Rican Women's History New Perspectives* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

between traditional labor histories on the island and in the United States by documenting the history of Puerto Rican labor and migration.³³

When I began my research for this dissertation I hoped to find stories about the ways that gender ideology and state interventions had impacted the lives of individual Puerto Ricans during the construction of the U.S. managed colonial state. I was particularly interested in exploring the changing working lives of Puerto Rican working class and middle class women. I was curious about relationships between working class people and the expanding middle class, the changes in service, domestic and caring labor brought about by industrialization and modernization, and the ways that migration and movement to the United States had impacted the lives of Puerto Ricans and in how the Puerto Rican state institutions had managed and directed labor migrations. Such questions led me to state archives located in Puerto Rico's General Archive. Upon the suggestion of mentors and archivists, I was encouraged to explore the records of the Department of Public Welfare where I found an abundance of stories that spoke to my initial questions about gender, labor, and the development of class and racial divisions in Puerto Rican communities on the island and in the United States.³⁴ I then decided to focus my attention on exploring the records of the Social Service Section of the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor in the United States located in the Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora in New York, tracing the connections

³³ Carmen Teresa Whalen. *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

³⁴ I thank historian Eileen Findlay in particular for guiding me towards these social welfare archives.

between social welfare agencies on the island and programs created for Puerto Rican migrants in the U.S.

In these social welfare records I encountered a massive bureaucratic archive largely untouched by researchers that housed countless stories of the intervention of the Puerto Rican government into the lives of working class Puerto Ricans through the creation of social welfare programs. Overwhelmed by an abundance of archival information I began to sample case files from a variety of districts and sections of the archive; from the start I saw the connections between the archive in Puerto Rico and that of the Migration Division in the United States. The theme of migration was constantly present in the case files that I pulled off the dusty shelves of the Archivo General. In turn, when I was working in New York I saw the names of the same social workers managing cases in the U.S. working with Puerto Rican clients. As I would discover, Migration Division agents clearly served as intermediaries between thousands of migrant Puerto Ricans and U.S. government agencies, both federal and local. The story of these two depositories of information was intimately intertwined. However, while the construction and management of a transnational state organization of information about citizens and a transnational archive was fascinating, it afforded me little insight into a larger problem that emerged from my initial research—what was this archive actually mapping? What were the programs that had resulted in its formation? What was the history of social welfare in Puerto Rico? Convinced that I could easily make better sense of these records by delving into secondary sources on the history of the development of social welfare programs and policy in Puerto Rico, I paused my archival research and returned to the U.S. and Puerto Rican literature on the topic.

What resulted from my exploration of the history of the development of social welfare programs and policy in Puerto Rico was my discovery of a gap in the literature on the history of U.S. colonial and territorial social welfare. When I began trying to trace the history of the extension of U.S. social policies and legislation and the emergence of the “welfare state” in Puerto Rico I found that there was little literature on the ways that these policies had emerged. There are few notable and important exceptions, such as sociologist Marietta Morrissey’s documentation of a need for further studies on the colonial history of social welfare policy, legal scholarship on inequalities in U.S. social legislation as applied to territorial spaces, and social workers histories about earlier generations in their field as state agents. However, unlike in the broader literature on Latin America and the United States there were no monographs on the development of social welfare policy under U.S. colonial management or the people that had participated in the formation of these policies.³⁵

Drawing upon the insights of historical scholarship on welfare in the United States and Latin America I began exploring the meaning of “welfare” as a set of policies whose development could be traced to different legislative moments. In particular, I relied on historian Linda Gordon’s definition of welfare as a set of state policies of social provision created for poor citizens. Gordon highlights how discourses in the United States conceptualize welfare as specific public assistance programs, not the full spectrum of social provisions created by the state. Building upon this insight I explore “welfare” as a category in flux, something that has changed over time and across contexts. I also build upon historian Donna Guy’s argument that the development of welfare must be

³⁵ Marietta Morrissey, "The Making of a Colonial Welfare State US Social Insurance and Public Assistance in Puerto Rico," *Latin American Perspectives* 33, no.1 (2006): 23-41.

considered as a process rather than a product, something that is built and reworked by state officials, administrators and clients. Drawing from these studies on gender and the state in the United States and Latin America, I began exploring how ideas about gender and welfare were central to state building projects in Puerto Rican communities.³⁶

Thus, in trying to make basic sense of the archive, I realized that the history of the colonial contours of the development of the U.S. welfare state in Puerto Rico, and the history of Puerto Rican access to the social provisions and legislation originally created for U.S. citizens, was a major silence in the larger historiography of the U.S. welfare state and also in the history of the development of the Puerto Rican state under U.S. rule.

Through exploring the history of social welfare programs I realized that I could probe the question of how Puerto Ricans were interacting with the changing colonial state and how Puerto Ricans experienced differences in territorial citizenship through the lens of access to social policy and benefits. In doing my research I also quickly realized that the history of welfare was largely a story about the political organizing and activism of Puerto Rican women; women were state builders involved in all levels of political discourse and organization. In particular, the path-breaking scholarship written by Puerto Rican social workers on the history of their own profession and the lives of the first social workers in Puerto Rico opened up my eyes to an entire range of women's history and lives as parts

³⁶ As historians of social welfare have shown in United States history the designation of these programs as "welfare" marks them as different from other government sponsored programs for citizens like schools or public transportation. See: Linda Gordon addresses the question "What is welfare?" in her study: Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: Free Press, 1994). Donna Guy's path breaking history of the women's political organizing and activism in Argentina has asserted that women played foundational roles in "building the welfare state. Donna Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*. For other studies of social welfare in Latin America: Latin American History See: Nichole Sanders. *Gender and Welfare in Mexico: The Consolidation of a Postrevolutionary State*. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011). Ann Shelby Blum, *Domestic Economies Family, Work, and Welfare in Mexico City, 1884-1943* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

of state institutions that allowed me to begin thinking about my archive in new ways. In pairing this research with my reading of case files from social welfare archives, depositories where I had read about the lives of hundreds of clients, I was able to begin grasping the massive administrative transformation, largely managed and navigated by women, that had resulted from the creation of social welfare programs.

The colonial contours of the United States welfare state have remained largely missing from histories of the development of social welfare programs. Despite this omission in the scholarship, my dissertation shows that Puerto Ricans—and the problem of colonial and territorial citizenship—have always figured into debates over social welfare. How Puerto Rico was going to be included or excluded from social policies created for United States citizens has been a central question of Puerto Rican policymakers throughout the decades. From the very first moments when social reformers and activists in the United States worked to create social welfare legislation and programs that would develop new rights and benefits for United States citizens, Puerto Ricans were active in lobbying for Puerto Rico and other territories inclusion under these provisions. This dissertation traces the development of the welfare state in Puerto Rico through five formative moments in its construction and in doing so traces the growth of social welfare agencies and policies from in a narrow set of policies that touched the lives of hundreds of Puerto Ricans in 1917 to programs that were distributing aid to over half the population by 1970. In each of these moments I explore how the arena of social policy legislation and territorial coverage became a space where Puerto Ricans made claims as United States Citizens despite the fact that they were not formally entitled to the same citizenship rights as mainland citizens. Puerto Ricans lobbied the U.S. Congress, within

which they had no representation but which had control over determining the laws of Puerto Rico, for the extension of emerging social legislation and policies.

I begin telling this story by tracing the development of a few social welfare programs created in 1917 after the nominal extension of US citizenship to Puerto Rico. While Puerto Ricans didn't have rights to social welfare provisions, Puerto Rican and US reformers worked to have Puerto Ricans included under some of these early provisions. This began with the creation of a few parallel programs for veterans and their families that were administered by the American Red Cross in Puerto Rico. The creation of social welfare initiatives during World War I opened up a space for a few early Puerto Rican women to enter the social work profession and to become a part of larger discussions about the creation of social welfare provisions that would continue in peacetime. These social workers advocated for Puerto Rico and other territories to be covered under the first federally mandated maternal and child welfare legislation created after the passing of the Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921, whose full title was the Promotion of the Welfare and Hygiene of Maternity and Infancy Act.³⁷ While the inclusion of Puerto Rico under the titles of federally mandated child and maternal health programs mainly only had symbolic effect, because only a small population were the beneficiaries of these programs, the inclusion began to set a new precedent that the island could be covered under social policy. This suggested to Puerto Rican reformers and U.S. colonial administrators on the island that the space of social policy could be a place where Puerto Ricans could advocate for social benefits for Puerto Ricans, opening up a space of inclusion within state organizations, while formal citizenship rights remained elusive.

³⁷ On the history of the Children's Bureau see: Kriste Lindenmeyer, *A Right to Childhood: The U.S. Children's Bureau and Child Welfare, 1912-46* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

While in the beginning the coverage and political meaning of Puerto Rico's inclusions as a territory under federal social welfare policies had limited meanings this would drastically increase with the creation of the social welfare programs under the New Deal in the 1930s. I trace the partial inclusion of New Deal social programs by exploring the development of Puerto Rican agencies, including the creation in 1933 of the *Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration* (PRERA) and in 1935 of the *Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration* (PRRA).³⁸ Within a year of the creation of the first New Deal agency in Puerto Rico, the PRERA, over 33 percent of the population was relying on some form of assistance from the organization. This marked a massive change in the relationship between the colonial state and the Puerto Rican population that was dictated through new forms of governance largely directed by relief administrators and social workers. These relief programs were accompanied by transformations in the colonial state and its role in the lives of Puerto Rican citizens as the reformist agenda of the Puerto Rican government that also aimed to modernize and develop the island through the creation of these social programs.³⁹ I highlight how these programs were largely run by Puerto Rican social workers, mostly women, who were particularly concerned about how these programs would impact Puerto Rican women and their families. These modernization projects also opened up spaces for the professionalization of women that resulted in new forms of social activism and organizing during the New Deal. The next crucial moment I explore is the early 1940s consolidation of the populist reformist

³⁸ Thomas Mathews, *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960).

³⁹ Manuel R. Rodriguez, *A New Deal for the Tropics: Puerto Rico During the Depression Era, 1932-1935* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010).

program of the *Partido Popular Democrático*. This resulted in the establishment in 1943 of the first island wide Department of Public Welfare. The PPD political platform was closely tied discussions of social justice that included the promise of social services and resulted in the exponential growth of the social welfare organizations after the 1940s.⁴⁰ I also show how Puerto Rico's inclusion under U.S. federal social welfare policies was also closely tied to the reworking of Puerto Rico's territorial status that occurred with the creation of the *Estado Libre Asociado*.

The final moment that I look at is the development of Puerto Rican government agencies in the United States that worked to manage the social welfare and social policy coverage of Puerto Rican migrants. In this section I show how social workers helped expand the function of the U.S. offices of the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor into a robust agency that addressed the social service needs of migrants. These social workers also direction addressed the exclusions faced by Puerto Ricans in the U.S. when they tried to claim the benefits of social rights afforded to them as U.S. citizens.⁴¹ In so doing these social workers also inserted themselves in discourses about Puerto Rican poverty in the United States and worked to advocate for a different perception of Puerto Rican migrants. These social workers also advocated for the extension of the Social Security Act of 1935 to Puerto Rico as a means to reduce Puerto Rican poverty and lessen migration to the United States. Their efforts contributed to the partial extension of the legislation in 1949. However, despite these changes, many of the colonial differences in social policy remained steadfast. My discussion of this political

⁴⁰ James Dietz, *Negotiating Development and Change* (Boulder: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2003).

⁴¹ For more on the Migration Division also see: Michael Lapp, "Managing Migration: The Migration Division of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1948-1968" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1990).

organizing also traces the emergence of new transnational forms of social work and social service developed for migrants within these agencies. I reveal how within the Migration Division social workers designed a Social Services Division to help migrants navigate the impacts of displacement by creating offices where migrants could get help claiming social welfare benefits.

Throughout each of these moments in the history of social welfare my project traces how, even though formal political U.S. citizenship was severely restricted by U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico, which afforded the island's residents a territorial variant of citizenship that formally had little political meaning, Puerto Ricans nevertheless mobilized the concept of U.S. citizenship to work towards the expansion of coverage under social provisions and social policies granted to U.S. citizens with the formation of the social welfare policies and the emergence of the welfare state. This chronology reveals that one of the major changes with the transition to the new colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States that emerged after the New Deal and the development of the populist reform movement spearheaded by the PPD was the expansion of coverage under social legislation for Puerto Ricans.

United States historians have referred to inclusion under these social policies as "social citizenship," drawing upon T.H. Marshall's definition of the benefits of citizenship as expanding beyond political citizenship.⁴² This literature has highlighted how gender and racial ideologies have resulted in exclusions to this social citizenship that have left women and communities considered non-white without entitlement to the same

⁴² Thomas H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge, 1950.).

social provisions as white male citizens.⁴³ Marshall imagined that social citizenship evolved naturally after the consolidation of civil and political citizenship. But in many cases, the advent of social citizenship for some evolved before the expansion of civil and political rights to others. In Puerto Rico the use of the term “social citizenship” is similarly complicated because Puerto Ricans are formally restricted in their access to civil and political rights. However, in Puerto Rico exploring the social policies and contents of “social rights” or “social citizenship” in similar ways to this U.S. literature can help explain the changes in Puerto Ricans’ relationship to the United States government I trace in this dissertation. Thinking about the variant of Puerto Rican “social rights” developed during this period can open up a discursive space to examine Puerto Rican struggles for coverage under social legislation, the benefits and access to federal programs created for Puerto Ricans, as well as the interventions in the lives of working class Puerto Ricans that resulted from the partial implementation of U.S. social policy to its territories. Yet it is crucial to restate that for Puerto Ricans on the island the expanding welfare state did not create any constitutionally protected “rights,” but rather an incomplete set of legislative benefits, applied at the discretion of the U.S. Congress.

The story that I tell about these programs centers on the lives of social workers and clients who advocated for an expansion of Puerto Ricans’ access to “social rights.” In piecing together the worlds and lives of social workers, I explore how history of the extension of social policy to Puerto Rico was not a story only of top-down colonial

⁴³ Deborah E. Ward, *The White Welfare State The Racialization of U.S. Welfare Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), Priscilla A. Dowden-White *Groping Toward Democracy African American Social Welfare Reform in St. Louis, 1910-1949*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011. Alyosha Goldstein, *Poverty in Common: The Politics of Community Action During the American Century*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. Cybelle Fox. *Three Worlds of Relief Race, Immigration, and the American Welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

administration and creation of social policy that was dictated from Washington to Puerto Rico. Rather, the politics of negotiation of the creation of social policy and the development of social welfare programs had been influenced in powerful ways by the organizing and activism of generation of women whose own *gendered* labor was largely missing from the historical record. Women were everywhere, busy shaping politics and history, and they were far from docile or dependent. From the highest levels of politics (lobbying Congress for the extension of federal social provisions) to the being the “foot-soldiers” of colonial interventions in the lives of the working-class in thousands of clinics and government agencies around the island, Puerto Rican women became the face of the U.S. state and emerged as political actors in varied and complex ways.

These social workers also created professional organizations that became platforms for political action, called for the extension of the Social Security Act of 1935 to Puerto Rico, and lay the grounds for further struggles for Puerto Rican civil and social rights. They also entered new roles as experts on migration when they traveled to the U.S. for training and were asked by U.S. social welfare agencies to help adjust and integrate Puerto Rican migrants. I explore the central role that social workers played in developing welfare bureaucracies and networks that developed services for clients in the island and the U.S and the tensions that emerged surrounding Puerto Ricans territorial citizenship and the restrictions to full citizenship they faced in the U.S. This dissertation contributes to a discussion of the origins of social welfare state formation in the imperial context of Puerto Rico by focusing on the role of Puerto Rican and United States reformers, many of whom were women, as the architects of early social policies. It also

explores the ways these women used new methodologies of casework to imagine the poor as “clients” of a newly modernizing Puerto Rican welfare state.

Through my examination of case files, I also explored the interventions of social workers in the lives and work of working class Puerto Ricans’ who became their clients. It centers on a close reading of their case files to consider how they negotiated the contents of their benefits with social workers in the intimate and often invasive process of social casework. Every individual applying for benefits underwent this process in which the new roles of social worker and client were constructed and performed. Combined, the stories interrogate how clients were produced within the textual practices of casework and provide a glimpse of how the formation of social welfare programs and the meaning of women’s labor was negotiated in interactions between state officials and citizens. Drawing upon case files from the Puerto Rican Department of Welfare in the General Archives of Puerto Rico I explore how state programs regulated Puerto Rican lives in particularly gendered ways as women and their families, many of which were being transformed by migration, became clients. Examining case files from social welfare offices I show how social workers manifested the abstract political ideologies of the state into concrete social policy, in turn locating their clients within gender, class, and race categories. Placement into these categories had tangible material consequences for those seeking food, shelter, and care. Social work interviews were sites of struggle both among social workers and between social workers and clients over how benefits would be administered.

Case files show that the development of welfare programs were integral to a broader labor history, as some women emerged as state agents and architects of the state

and others became both targets of government labor recruitment and management schemes and clients of social welfare programs.⁴⁴ This labor history is twofold. On the one hand, it shows how creation of social welfare programs required a massive amount of work. Over the course of the twentieth century, a group of women became professionalized as social workers and in turn played a large role in the building of the welfare state in Puerto Rico. These professional women crafted social welfare programs in ways that reflected their own political agendas and that were conditioned the political worlds of Puerto Rican communities throughout the twentieth-century. On the other hand, this is also a labor history of women on welfare. It argues that clients of welfare programs were mainly working-class women who provided essential productive and reproductive labor in their communities.⁴⁵ When these women became clients of the welfare state they entered new roles and were cast in a new relationships to the state institutions. The dissertation traces the emergence of these two groups of women and the interactions between them and the larger communities in which they lived.

My investigation of the case files of social work programs also shows how working class women and girls who performed domestic, service, and care work became a key demographic in social welfare programs. Building on scholarship on the intersection of welfare and work and the history of caring labor, I explore how the history

⁴⁴ I thinking about the gendered labor of welfare state building I draw on Donna Guys work in Argentina: Donna J. Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

⁴⁵ Here I draw on the perspectives of scholars writing about the history of welfare as well as welfare recipients organizing for “Welfare Rights.” Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005). Premilla Nadasen. *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005). Rhonda Y. Williams *The Politics of Public Housing Black Women's Struggles against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Felicia Ann Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

of welfare is also a story about gender and labor.⁴⁶ My project shows how social workers investigated women and children's caring labor in early studies of maternal health, managed work relief programs for women during the New Deal, and developed casework processes that recorded women's labor in the first island- wide social welfare programs. Social workers were also instrumental in regulating the migration of Puerto Rican women to become domestic workers in the United States, and through their work for the Puerto Rican government and U.S. social welfare agencies in the United States, they worked with many women and girls employed in care work in the United States. Studying the history of welfare offers a different vantage point from which to investigate the history of women's work and the production of gendered divisions of labor with both professional and working class groups.

Chapter Overview

This dissertation is organized chronologically and focuses on the ways social workers and clients constructed and navigated social welfare program in Puerto Rico between 1917 and the 1960s. The first three chapters focus on the construction of social welfare programs on the island, while still considering the importance of emigration in shaping these programs. Chapter one, "Writing Empire, Producing the State: Beatriz Lassalle del Valle and the Development of Social Work and Welfare," traces the creation of the first social welfare programs developed after U.S. citizenship was extended to

⁴⁶ See for example: Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein. *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Evelyn Nakano Glenn. *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Puerto Rico in 1917. By documenting the transnational life and work of Beatriz Lassalle, an early social worker, I demonstrate how social welfare reformers in Puerto Rico became advocates for the island's inclusion within newly created social welfare programs. In chapter two, "Building Bienestar Público: Puerto Rican Social Workers and the Colonial Politics of Social Security during the New Deal" I follow Puerto Rican social workers during the New Deal as they were recruited by the Puerto Rican government and developed social welfare programs throughout the island. The third chapter, "Claiming Benefits: Using Microhistory to Explore How Working Class Women Became 'Clients' in Social Welfare Programs after 1943," explores the development of social welfare programs under the PPD. It focuses on the lives of two applicants who became clients in the program.

The last two chapters of the dissertation focus on Puerto Rican migration to the United States and the central role that social workers and social welfare policies played in shaping labor migration and integration into U.S. economies and communities during and after the 1940s. In chapter five, "Mobile Social Workers and Clients: Transnational Labor Migration, Reform and Regulation," I explore social workers role in the development of state-sponsored emigration policy and programs in the 1940s, their work with working-class women, and the development of the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor. They oversaw the mass migration of Puerto Ricans in subsequent years, when nearly half of the island's population moved to the United States. In the sixth chapter, "The Migration Division in Action: Transnational Casework and the Politics of Social Security after 1948," I show how within the Migration Division social workers carved out an important space in which to advocate for migrant and labor rights for

Puerto Rican people within the offices of the Puerto Rican government in the United States. I also explore particular case files that highlight these transnational forms of casework developed by social workers. In the conclusion, “From Transnational Casework to Community Organizing: The Transformation of Puerto Rican Social Work after 1950,” I explore how Puerto Rican social workers, impacted by these experiences in the United States, moved away from earlier forms of traditional and transnational casework towards the field of community organizing.

This dissertation traces how the field of social work became a space where a new group of Puerto Rican professionals, largely composed of women, developed social services that were specifically adapted to the needs and experiences of migrant citizens. Far from distanced government agents, these social workers’ experiences as migration experts also began to transform their own politics and vision of the field of social work itself. The conclusion brings my dissertation full circle, revealing how, between 1917 and the 1970s, social welfare policy and programs were sites where the rights of Puerto Rican citizenship were debated by U.S. officials, Puerto Rican social workers, and clients. I highlight how the work of social workers provides a remarkable window onto women’s political activism in Puerto Rico during the twentieth century. Despite this legacy, these women remain largely missing from both histories of the Puerto Rican state and histories of social welfare in the United States. It has also made invisible the crucial role of U.S. colonialism in the development of the transnational welfare state. My work responds to this gap in the historiography by tracing the long history of social welfare in Puerto Rico.

CHAPTER ONE

Writing Empire, Producing the State: Beatriz Lassalle del Valle and the Development of Social Work and Welfare in Puerto Rico

“Our work is to serve, serve, serve no matter how small the service. The education of an individual should not just serve them exclusively, but also serve others. Someone that receives the benefits of a good education and academic preparation has the obligation to help better the welfare of the community in which they live. The social worker has the main responsibility, which means that they must sacrifice many of their free hours to work on committees that help orient public opinion. The word service should be what defines social work.”

-Beatriz Lassalle del Valle⁴⁷

During the spring and summer of 1920, Beatriz Lassalle del Valle, a thirty eight year old teacher from San Juan, embarked on a series of journeys away from her home in Puerto Rico that transformed her from a teacher into a social worker.⁴⁸ The social

⁴⁷ In October of 1946 the *Revista de Servicio Social*, the publication of the *Colegio de Trabajadores Sociales*, the main professional organization of social workers in Puerto Rico dedicated a volume of the journal to Beatriz Lassalle. They published an interview with Lassalle by Julia Denoyers, one of the editors and a fellow social worker. Julia Denoyers, “Servir, divisa de una vida,” *Revista de Servicio Social* 7, no. 4 (1946): 114.

⁴⁸ There is a resume of Beatriz Lassalle’s work up until 1935 published in Dorothy Bourne’s study of the development of social work training programs Puerto Rico. See: Dorothy Bourne, *Professional Training for Social Work in Puerto Rico* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: University of Puerto Rico, 1935), 13. Lassalle also discusses her participation in the field of social work as a newspaper column she wrote in 1935. Beatriz Lassalle, “Un poco mas sobre el trabajo social en Puerto Rico,” *El Mundo*, October 11, 1935, 9. Additional

feminist and reformer first traveled to New York City, where she was trained in the most cutting edge methods of social casework and investigation. The Puerto Rican government and American Red Cross funded Lassalle's education. They selected the seasoned teacher as an emissary, intending for her to gain the skills necessary to revamp social service programs on the island. Puerto Ricans had recently been made United States soldiers and citizens during World War I, and United States and Puerto Rican politicians wrestled over what the obligations, rights, and benefits of United States citizenship would look like for this new body of colonial citizens. The expansion of social reform and attempts to address widespread poverty and social dislocation via social welfare programs would be important in this transition. After her studies, Lassalle was given little time to implement her new vision of peacetime social services in San Juan before she was summoned by the Children's Bureau of the Department of Labor to meet with their agents in Washington, DC. Over a frenzied month of meetings with the leaders of the Children's Bureau, Lassalle discussed whether the agency's programs would be extended to Puerto Rico.⁴⁹ Would the fledgling social welfare provisions recently created by reformers who strove to build a welfare state in the United States be stretched into the United States imperial territories? If so, in what form?

biographical details about Lassalle's life are included in three volumes of compiled biographies of Puerto Rican women, see: María Luisa de Angelis, *Mujeres puertorriqueñas: que se han distinguido en el cultivo de las ciencias, las letras y las artes desde el siglo XVII hasta nuestros días* (Puerto Rico: Tip. de Real Hermanos, 1910), 155. Angela Negrón Muñoz, *Mujeres de Puerto Rico: desde el período de colonización hasta el primer tercio del siglo XX* (San Juan, P.R.: Imprenta Venezuela, 1935), 170-173. Lola Krüger Torres, *Enciclopedia grandes mujeres de Puerto Rico* (Hato Rey, P.R.: Ramallo Bros. Printing, 1975), 295-298.

⁴⁹ Lassalle mentions her travels to Washington in her interview with Julia Denoyers published in 1946. See Julia Denoyers, "Servir, divisa de una vida," 114.

This chapter explores how social reformers debated whether the Sheppard Towner Act for the Promotion of Welfare and Hygiene of Maternity and Infancy of 1921 was going to be extended to Puerto Rico and other colonial territories. These questions became central within the discussions of reformers because many liberal reformers, like Horace Mann Towner of Iowa (for whom the bill was named) traveled to Puerto Rico during this period. Towner was appointed the governor of Puerto Rico shortly after he proposed this legislation. Julia Lathrop of the United States Children's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor drafted the Sheppard Towner Act and it widely considered by social welfare scholars to be the legislation that marked the first step in the United States towards comprehensive social security and the creation of federal social welfare benefits. The Children's Bureau drafted a bill that would address infant mortality in the United States by providing five thousand dollar grants to states that would be matched by each state. The first major impact that this program had in the United States was the creation of three thousand child and maternal health centers that were meant to combat infant mortality through services to women and children. The passage of this legislation was extremely controversial and opponents described it as providing "socialized" medicine and as being a "socialist" bill. Among these opponents was the American Medical Association who in 1929 was successful in pushing for the funding of the bill to lapse so that these programs would be restricted. However, despite the fact that this bill was eventually abandoned, it marked a definitive transition in the role of the federal government in the lives of citizens that would provide a precedent for the development of social welfare programs in future years. Legislation like the Sheppard-Towner Act paved the way for welfare state and also provided a platform for the

organization of a network of women reformers and social workers in the Children's Bureau to expand their vision of the possibilities of social welfare programs.

This chapter explores the ways that Puerto Rican social reformers like Beatriz Lassalle were enlisted to help to investigate the possibility of expanding these social programs to Puerto Rico and what the resulting collaborations looked like. During the 1920s Lassalle traveled multiple times to the United States to meet with representatives of the Children's Bureau to discuss how Puerto Rico and other territories might be covered by social legislation. Afterward she was placed in charge of the development of a number of Children's Bureau directed studies of social welfare on the island that were used by policy makers to make arguments for the extension of social policies and the social rights of United States citizenship to the island.

Beatriz Lassalle worked with the Children's Bureau agents to outline a program that would investigate social welfare institutions in Puerto Rico as well as promote the creation of new social agencies and legislation.⁵⁰ They decided that the Puerto Rican activities would begin with Lassalle's administration of a "Children's Year" modeled on those developed in the United States, which had raised awareness about child welfare and infant mortality. She would also oversee an investigation of child welfare agencies in Puerto Rico to be written up by one of the agencies publication managers, Helen Bary. The report would be used as a diagnostic of Puerto Rico's needs as well as a justification for the creation of social services and the extension of federal legislation to the United States territory. In 1923, the completed report was published by the Children's Bureau as

⁵⁰ Ibid.

“Child Welfare in the Insular Possessions of the United States, Part I. Porto Rico.”⁵¹ The study represented the agency’s foray into new intellectual and political territory by tackling the increasingly imperial role of the United States abroad in relationship to the development of social welfare policy. It was also the product of a colonial web of knowledge production resulting from collaboration between mainland officials, the numerous colonial officials appointed to the island, and local Puerto Rican participants.

Tracing the history of social welfare in Puerto Rico reveals the imperial role of the United States welfare state structures as they reached beyond the mainland. This chapter builds on the rich literature about the history of the Children’s Bureau that has documented the way that United States citizenship was framed by the women who worked in this agency.⁵² It also responds to calls for more investigation into the imperial and Pan-American movements of United States social welfare discourse and agents, particularly in Latin America.⁵³ It suggests that the ways that United States imperial social welfare practice worked in colonial territories remains understudied as a central

⁵¹ Although there were other studies planned by the Children’s Bureau, particularly one of the Virgin Islands, these studies were never conducted, and the study on Puerto Rico was the only project published in this series. Helen Valeska Bary and Children’s Bureau, *Child Welfare in the Insular Possessions of the United States. Part I* (Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, Children’s Bureau : Government Printing Office, 1923).

⁵² On the history of the Children’s Bureau and its agents see: Kriste Lindenmeyer, *A Right to Childhood: The U.S. Children's Bureau and Child Welfare, 1912-46* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

⁵³ On the imperial expansion of the Children’s Bureau little has been written, but a path-breaking article by Katharine S. Bullard that includes a brief discussion of the agencies work in Puerto Rico, see: Katharine S. Bullard, “Children’s Future, Nation’s Future: Race, Citizenship, and the United States Children’s Bureau” in Dirk Schumann. *Raising Citizens in the "Century of the Child": The United States and German Central Europe in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010). On the role of Children’s Bureau agents in Pan-American discussions of children’s rights see: Donna J. Guy, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

site of the “close encounters of empire” after 1898.⁵⁴ The formation of welfare state programs suggests how the intimate working of the colonial state was forged in local and transnational negotiations between Puerto Rican reformers, citizens, and United States colonial officials. However, the framing of such a story can be tricky when colonial archives written by colonial officials can often obscure the participation of Puerto Rican actors, especially women, in the history of state formation.⁵⁵

This chapter explores the life of sometimes-footnoted “Jane Addams of Puerto Rico,” whose name was given to the School of Social Work at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras.⁵⁶ My investigation explores how Lassalle’s work resulted in the development of government agencies and policies that changed the role of the Puerto Rican colonial state in society. In this chapter, I write Lassalle into the history of colonial state as a central proponent for the formation of social welfare programs, as well as an author, investigator, and social reformer. I explore her role as a state agent and as a member of an expanding group of professional Puerto Rican women in the 1920.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ On the cultural history of United States Empire in Latin America See: Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine LeGrand, and Ricardo Donato Salvatore, *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998). In Puerto Rico see for example: Julian Go, *American Empire and the Politics of Meaning: Elite Political Cultures in the Philippines and Puerto Rico During U.S. Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). Pedro Caban, *Constructing a Colonial People: Puerto Rico and the United States, 1898-1932* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999).

⁵⁵ The problems of using colonial archives is described in a number of works, Ann Stoler in particular has grappled with this problem in her discussion of the intimate work of imperial projects, see: Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁵⁶ Gordon Lewis refers to Beatriz Lassalle as the “Jane Addams of insular history” in his writing on Puerto Rican history and politics. See Gordon K. Lewis, *Puerto Rico: Freedom and Power in the Caribbean* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963), 423.

⁵⁷ For more on the role of Puerto Rican women activists in public health work see: Alice Colón, Margarita Mergal, and Nilsa Torres, *Participación de la mujer en la historia de Puerto Rico: las primeras décadas del siglo veinte* (Puerto Rico: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1986), Blanca Silvestrini, “La política de salud pública de los Estados Unidos en Puerto Rico, 1898-1913:



Figure I.1. Beatriz Lassalle del Valle

Lassalle helped facilitate the entrance of numerous other women into professional roles as care workers in the fields of teaching, nursing, and social work throughout her career. In doing so, she changed the composition of the state itself, feminizing its labor force over the course of her career. I also consider Lassalle's work in some of the sites where the new identities of social worker and client were constructed and performed for the first time within social welfare programs.

Consecuencias en el proceso de americanización," *Politics, Society, and Culture in the Caribbean*, ed. Blanca Silvestrini (Rio Piedras: Univ. de Puerto Rico, 1983): 67-84.

Beatriz Lassalle del Valle, From Teacher to Social Reformer

Beatriz Lassalle del Valle's life followed a route through the imperial Atlantic world that began when she was a young teacher in Puerto Rico. After her birth in Ponce in 1882, her father, Francisco, a lawyer of partial African descent, moved the family to the capital city of San Juan.⁵⁸ She graduated from the Normal School in San Juan and became a schoolteacher in 1898, when she was just sixteen years old. Had this occurred in any previous year, the young woman may have embarked upon a promising career as a teacher under the Spanish system. Instead, she witnessed the bombardment of her home city by United States troops and the subsequent takeover of the island. When Puerto Rico was ceded by Spain to the United States at the end of the Spanish American War Lassalle's life took a drastic turn. In the aftermath of the transition, her father secured his family's status within the new U.S. colonial regime when he was appointed a municipal judge in San Juan. He was one of a small group of other lawyers of African descent that negotiated a position within the reworked insular government despite the racism they faced in both Puerto Rican and United States political circles. Thus, while Lassalle's

⁵⁸ 1910 United States Census Record for Francisco Lassalle Doval household. Francisco Lassalle is listed as a "mulatto" and municipal judge. Beatriz Lassalle's mother, Eselvina Valle Rivera de Lassalle is listed as white. Beatriz is listed as "mulatta" and her sister is listed as "white." It is possible that her sister was from an earlier union or that the family members were categorized differently. Francisco Lassalle was born around 1858 on the island and was 52 years old in 1910, living in Mercado, San Juan, Puerto Rico. The family was also living with a number of black and white servants in the household, suggesting they were well off. In the Fourth Annual Report of the Governor of Puerto Rico in 1904, Francisco Lassalle is listed as a "Secretary- District No 1- San Juan". On the 1920 census Beatriz is no longer living her parents, only her sister, and they are both listed as white.

family was a part of an elite group that had access to educational opportunities that were rare during this period, their experience was framed by the racial politics of the time.⁵⁹

Shortly after the U.S. invasion Lassalle's father arranged for her to travel to the United States to continue her studies and learn English, a decision that opened up a radically new life experience.⁶⁰ Within a year of the occupation, she boarded her first steamship and made the journey to New York City en route to begin her studies as a student in a summer program at Harvard University.⁶¹ She was just one of numerous young Puerto Ricans and Cubans who were sent abroad, some of whom were sponsored by their own families or by educational scholarships from the new government. The main goal of these efforts was to "Americanize" the students, teaching them about United States institutions and culture, so they could use their experience as agents for the colonial project back home.⁶² The students' experiences varied, and many faced prejudice

⁵⁹ For more on the position of Afro-Puerto Rican men negotiating status in this period see: Jesse Hoffnug-Garskof, "To Abolish the Law of Castes: Merit, Manhood and the Problem of Colour in the Puerto Rican Liberal Movement, 1873-92." *Social History* 36, no. 3 (2011): 312-342. For more on the history of race in Puerto Rico in general see: Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), Jesse Hoffnug-Garskof, "The Migrations of Arturo Schomburg: On Being Antillano, Negro, and Puerto Rican in New York 1891-1938." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 1 (2001): 3-49, Ileana M. Rodríguez-Silva, *Silencing Race: Disentangling Blackness, Colonialism, and National Identities in Puerto Rico* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁶⁰ Denoyers, "Servir, divisa de una vida."

⁶¹ Lassalle spent one summer at Harvard where she took courses in "English and Nature Study." See: Bourne, *Professional Training for Social Work in Puerto Rico*, 13.

⁶² Some students were segregated and funneled into educational institutions according to how colonial officials imagined their racial status. Some ended up at training schools dedicated to "racial uplift," like the Carlisle Indian School and Tuskegee Institute for African American students. Others enrolled at prestigious universities like Harvard and Yale alongside mostly white students. Include material about the schools that student enrolled in and their experiences. Around the same time that she arrived alone, there were simultaneously hundreds of other young female teachers that arrived to the city on military cargos sponsored by the Department of Education, bound for summer schools held at Columbia and Cornell. See: Juan José Osuna, *A History of Education in Puerto Rico* (Rio Piedras, P.R.: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1949), Juan José Osuna, "An Indian in Spite of Myself" *Summer School Review* 10, no 5 (1932), Aida Negrón de Montilla, *Americanization in Puerto Rico and the Public-School System, 1900-*

and isolation while working towards their degrees. Many of the students imagined that their participation in these programs would secure their social status upon their return, providing access to prestigious positions in the colonial government.

Traveling to New York City, Lassalle joined an already growing Puerto Rican migrant community. Lassalle and the other students who traveled through the bustling port toward educational institutions encountered a Puerto Rican community made up of expatriates, business owners, and working class laborers. Some were political exiles that had supported Spanish Caribbean independence struggles, while others found their way to the city because of the economic links that already bound the island to the United States' booming economy.⁶³ The Puerto Rican population was also splintering along class and race lines, as elite Puerto Ricans sought to distance themselves from poor migrants who arrived steadily to work in the city. After Lassalle studied at Harvard she traveled to Brooklyn and lived there for year a while learning about social agencies in the area. During this period Brooklyn was becoming the main location where working class migrants settled.⁶⁴ Lassalle experienced the formation of this transnational and

1930. (Rio Piedras, P.R: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1975), Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), Solsiree del Moral, *Negotiating Empire: The Cultural Politics of Schools in Puerto Rico, 1898-1952* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), José-Manuel Navarro, *Creating Tropical Yankees: Social Science Textbooks and U.S. Ideological Control in Puerto Rico, 1898-1908* (New York: Rutledge, 2002).

⁶³ On the early Puerto Rican migrant community in New York see: Virgina Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1917-1948* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1983), Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), Ruth Glasser, *My Music Is My Flag Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities, 1917-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, "The Migrations of Arturo Schomburg: On Being Antillano, Negro, and Puerto Rican in New York 1891-1938." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 1 (2001): 3-49.

⁶⁴ On the Brooklyn Puerto Rican community during the period see: Jesús Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* (New York: International Publishers, 1982).

increasingly stratified Puerto Rican community firsthand for a year as she studied and lived in New York City.

When Lassalle returned from the United States she brought her experiences to bear on her new work as a teacher and educational administrator. She began her career working in a public school under the rapidly expanding Department of Education and participated in the creation and extension of the public education system in Puerto Rico.⁶⁵ One of the main goals of the colonial officials in charge of this program and many in the Puerto Rican political class was to Americanize the population through an educational program taught mainly in English and targeted at training Puerto Ricans to be proper subjects of United States' rule. That is, they were supposed to be modernized, democratic, productive—ideas that were connected to existing ideas of social transformation and social mobility as resulting from education. Many of the teachers were women who entered into professional roles as agents of state programs for the first time and negotiated the role of the state in local communities.⁶⁶ Administrators selected these women because their gender roles were imagined as being naturally suited to maternal and caring labor. Additionally, large numbers of women from the United States were recruited because they were seen as being a civilizing and modernizing influence on the island. These women, under the direction of a host of male United States officials and

⁶⁵ On Lassalle's teaching career see: Angela Negrón Muñoz, *Mujeres de Puerto Rico: desde el periodo de colonización hasta el primer tercio del siglo XX* (San Juan, P.R.: Imprenta Venezuela, 1935).

⁶⁶ Solsiree del Moral, *Negotiating Empire: The Cultural Politics of Schools in Puerto Rico, 1898-1952* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

Puerto Rican administrators, ran an educational system that became the main state institution dedicated to the social transformation of Puerto Rico under US Empire.⁶⁷

As one of the first Puerto Rican women to receive a United States education in the aftermath of the invasion Lassalle was uniquely poised to take advantage of the growth of the Department of Education. Her career took off quickly as she became one of only a tiny group of women who rose up to occupy administrative positions in the agency.⁶⁸ She was hired to teach pedagogy at the Normal School in San Juan, which later became the University of Puerto Rico. Here she instructed other teachers about different practices and methods of teaching while she worked as an instructor and mentor in their model school. In the following years she became the first woman to become principle of her own school and to be selected as a school inspector.⁶⁹ These inspectors traveled around the island by car, train, and horseback, reviewing the work of other teachers. She also developed school curriculum and teaching materials used throughout the island.⁷⁰ One of these projects, a creative and easily accessible introduction to European mythology for Spanish speaking students, was later published as a book with study questions and teaching suggestions as an appendix.⁷¹ This book provides a glimpse at the creative and

⁶⁷ For an excellent discussion of domesticity, empire and care see: Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). On intimacy and imperialism also: Ann Laura Stoler, *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁶⁸ See: del Moral, *Negotiating Empire*.

⁶⁹ Angela Negrón Muñoz, *Mujeres de Puerto Rico*.

⁷⁰ On the role of the school inspector is discussed in, del Moral, *Negotiating Empire*.

⁷¹ Beatriz Lassalle, *Cuentos mitológicos. narrados para los niños de habla española* (Chicago; New York: Rand McNally, 1925).

inventive approach she brought to the educational process even as it reveals her skills as an aspiring writer.

As her career blossomed, Lassalle also became involved with women's activism in the Puerto Rican suffrage movement. She was a member of a small but growing number of professional women in the fields of education, health, and law that advocated for the rights of women and children in local, island-wide, Pan-American and international settings.⁷² As Lassalle became a leading figure in the women's movement she became well known throughout the island for her outspoken advocacy of women and children's rights. She also honed her research and writing skills as a journalist for the suffragist cause, cofounding a feminist publication called "La Voz Feminina." She developed close relationships with other leaders of the women's movement, including a number of socialist feminist leaders including Ricarda Lopez de Ramos Casellas, a fellow teacher and social reformer.⁷³ The two women were so close that Lassalle became Lopez her daughter's godmother. During the 1910s Lassalle became a leader in a colonial political world in which the rights of women and workers were being hotly debated. Throughout the decade, her work as a suffrage leader was closely intertwined with her career as a teacher, administrator, and social reformer, and her position in an expanding group of professional Puerto Rican women.

⁷² On the history of the suffrage movement in Puerto Rico see: María de F. Barceló Miller, *La lucha por el sufragio femenino en Puerto Rico, 1896-1935* (San Juan, P.R.: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales, 1997), Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz, "A Storm Dressed in Skirts": *Ambivalence in the Debate on Women's Suffrage in Puerto Rico, 1927-1929* Thesis (Ph. D.) (State University of New York at Binghamton, 1994), Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁷³ The friendship of Beatriz Lassalle and Ricarda López de Ramos Casellas and a wonderful image of Beatriz Lassalle with her goddaughter is located in: Sandra A. Enríquez Seiders, *Ricarda López de Ramos Casellas: tizas, conciencia y sufragio* (Colombia: Ediciones Callejón, 2006).

Lassalle framed her activism on behalf of women and children within a maternalist vision and social feminist vision that perceived women as naturally predisposed to caring labor.⁷⁴ Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz recounts how Lassalle's work and legacy was remembered and idealized by her fellow suffragettes. In the 1930s, her friend Angela Muñoz wrote that Lassalle was a shining example of "sacred motherhood."⁷⁵ She was memorialized as embodying the highest ideals of the women's movement during the 1920s as well as new ideas about the role of women as guides in the modernization of the island. Like other professional women of her time, she also came to see training in scientific methods of intervention as best preparing women to instigate social reforms in local communities. Lassalle's began her career as a public school teacher, who saw her role as increasingly extending beyond the confines of the classroom, into the homes of Puerto Rican families. Lassalle cast herself as a professional guide whose goal was to secure a safe home and economic support for the child. For Lassalle, her work as a teacher paralleled the work of other professional women, like nurses, who entered new roles as experts giving advice and assistance to working class people about how to manage their homes and lives. Lassalle's choice to highlight this experience as an early form of casework later in her career shows how professional women saw their labor as a form of caring that could transform Puerto Rican homes and society.

⁷⁴ There is a wealth of literature on the history of maternalism in the United States, particularly dealing with the formation of social welfare programs and policies. For example: Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Jan Doolittle Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism, 1920-30* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), Marian van der Klein, *Maternalism Reconsidered: Motherhood, Welfare and Social Policy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

⁷⁵ Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz, *"A Storm Dressed in Skirts": Ambivalence in the Debate on Women's Suffrage in Puerto Rico, 1927-1929* Thesis (Ph. D.), (State University of New York at Binghamton, 1994).

Beatriz Lassalle's activism and work developing the social work profession was profoundly impacted by the effervescent political organization and development of social movements occurring in Puerto Rico during the 1920s. As an active participant in the development of the suffrage movement in Puerto Rico, she was involved in debates over the rights of women, children and families that occurred between classes and amongst various political groups on the island. She was influenced by her close friendship with socialist leaders, by engaging with the strong labor movements organizing throughout the island, and by popular discourses about the rights of Puerto Rican workers. This moment of political fermentation opened up a space for her to develop a career as a feminist and advocate for Puerto Rican women and children. Her participation in the women's movement of this period went hand in hand with her own professionalization as a teacher in Puerto Rico, as she carved out a space for her work and activism.

The American Red Cross and the Professionalization of Care Work During World War I

The beginning of World War I and the subsequent granting of United States citizenship to Puerto Ricans with the Jones Act of 1917 opened up new opportunities for Puerto Rican women to professionalize. Women exercised their social feminist politics both through positions in political campaigns and in new professional capacities as colonial state officials. Directly after the passing of the Jones Act, Lassalle participated in the founding of an island-wide suffrage organization called the "Liga Feminina

Suffragista” and took a turn serving as its president.”⁷⁶ The suffrage movement picked up steam at the same time that many of its members entered new positions working for the expanding colonial government and the new social programs that were initiated as a result of the militarization of the island. As thousands of Puerto Rican men were drafted into the United States Army, their jobs in the teaching force and government opened up to women, leading to an increased feminization of education.⁷⁷ At the same time the development of the Las Casas military base in Santurce, Puerto Rico, and training of Puerto Rican soldiers led to increased state investment in public health and sanitation efforts aimed to groom the new Puerto Rican citizens for their role as soldiers.

In response to the militarization of Puerto Rico, a group of citizens petitioned for the creation of a branch of the American Red Cross on the island. The committee was made up of both appointed US colonial officials and local Puerto Rican politicians and elites.⁷⁸ When the office was created Puerto Rican and U.S. social feminists like Lassalle who worked in Department of Education and the suffrage movement were placed in charge of its work. These women recruited a group of volunteers to work in their offices in the San Juan neighborhood of Puerta de Tierra. The volunteers made goods and products that were sent to the front and distributed to soldiers and their families on the

⁷⁶ María de F Barceló Miller, *La lucha por el sufragio femenino en Puerto Rico, 1896-1935* (San Juan, P.R.: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales, 1997).

⁷⁷ del Moral, *Negotiating Empire*.

⁷⁸ “Historia de la cruz roja en Puerto Rico” *Bienestar Público*, October 1950. “The American Red Cross” in Fernández y García, Eugenio, Francis W. Hoadley, and Eugenio Astol, *El Libro De Puerto Rico/ The Book of Porto Rico* (San Juan, P.R.: El Libro Azul Pub. Co, 1923). José Enrique Flores Ramos, *Eugenesia, higiene pública y alcanfor para las pasiones: la prostitución en San Juan de Puerto Rico, 1876-1919* (Hato Rey, P.R.: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 2006).

island.⁷⁹ The United States Red Cross headquarters also sent experts in nursing to create a training program in nursing for Puerto Rico women. This program opened up a new space for many women to professionalize over the upcoming years.⁸⁰ The role of Puerto Rican women in the Red Cross during the war was widely heralded by the local press, which linked the care work of professional women to the militarization and transformation of the island during the war.

Red Cross workers also became involved in a variety of local hygiene campaigns near the military bases. These projects included building public health clinics and collaborating with the insular police force to regulate prostitution and venereal disease around military bases. There is a rich body of literature in Puerto Rican history that explores how the anti-prostitution campaign developed during the World War I War and how it resulted in the targeting of working class women who lived near bases as sexual deviants.⁸¹ This scholarship has documented the mass incarceration of poor women and the subsequent efforts of elite women to rehabilitate them through public health, vocational training, and social uplift. These histories reveal how elite women's groups like members of the Women's Temperance Union sought to define a reformist maternalist identity in juxtaposition to the perception of working class women's as

⁷⁹ Julia Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), Maríán Moser Jones, *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), Michele Landis Dauber, *The Sympathetic State: Disaster Relief and the Origins of the American Welfare State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁸⁰ For more on the history of U.S. colonial policy and Red Cross nursing see Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care*.

⁸¹ Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). José Enrique Flores Ramos, *Eugenesia, higiene pública y alcanfor para las pasiones: la prostitución en San Juan de Puerto Rico, 1876-1919* (Hato Rey, P.R.: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 2006).

sexually deviant during the war.⁸² The programs they created largely targeted urban women, some of whom were of African descent, but all of whom were imagined as racially “other” by reformers. In developing these programs, reformers like those in the Red Cross shaped ideas about race in local and imperial discourse.

Elite women were also involved in the less documented development of Red Cross relief projects that allocated financial assistance through payments to military families and the poor. During the war, a series of natural disasters occurred that included a hurricane and fire, that left hundred homeless and in need of help.⁸³ Red Cross workers were trained in disaster relief and the agency was in the midst of reworking itself as a global humanitarian organization.⁸⁴ In response to the Puerto Rican disasters the agency began operating a tent city for over 500 individuals and providing some financial relief for its residents. Around the same time the agency experimented with creating a Puerto Rican branch of “Home Services,” a program that provided economic support to families of soldiers. The Puerto Rican branch received most of its referrals from public school teachers and health clinics in the San Juan area. Small stipends were distributed to the wives of soldiers who were determined to be in financial need based on evaluations by social workers. These programs spread through the island over the course of the war and were precursors to the development of more formal social services.⁸⁵

⁸² Ian R. Tyrell *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

⁸³ José Enrique Flores Ramos, *Eugenesis, higiene pública y alcanfor para las pasiones*.

⁸⁴ Julia Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, Marian Moser Jones, *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal*.

⁸⁵ These programs have remained unstudied in the Puerto Rican context. However, in the United States context historians have written about as one of the main precursors to the creation of public welfare provision and the development of the welfare state.

One of the other programs developed by the Red Cross in Puerto Rico during this period was the Junior Red Cross (JRC), which Lassalle helped direct. The JRC programs reflected a new dedication to the ideas of child welfare and hygiene as a part of the public education curriculum.⁸⁶ The program focused on health programs for children that emphasized that the cultivation of a protected childhood was essential to a strong society. In the United States these ideas were tied to popular ideas about eugenics, which stressed that social change could be manifest through an emphasis on the regulation of public health, reproduction, and childcare.⁸⁷ The Puerto Rican version also was linked to the Latin American variety of this movement, called puericulture that imagined “racial degeneration” as resulting from unregulated reproduction and ill health in impoverished communities.⁸⁸ Within Puerto Rico and other imperial projects these movements were closely linked to the expanding field of tropical medicine that targeted particular diseases fostered in warm southern climates as causing social and racial “problems.”⁸⁹ Programs like the JRC were seen as directly addressing public health concerns through intervention in the lives of children and their families.

⁸⁶ Junior Red Cross, *The Junior Red Cross: A Program* (Washington: The American Red Cross, 1921), American Junior Red Cross, *A Program of Junior Red Cross Service, Outlined in Proceedings of the Educational Conference, January 7, 1918* (New York, N.Y.: University Printing Office, Columbia University, 1918).

⁸⁷ Alexandra Stern, *Eugenic Nation Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Gregory Michael Dorr, *Segregation's Science: Eugenics and Society in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008).

⁸⁸ Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), Donna J. Guy, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

⁸⁹ Alexandra Stern, *Eugenic Nation Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

The Junior Red Cross took on a more expansive role as a public health agency in the colonial context of Puerto Rico than in the mainland United States. The United States government thought of the public school system as a particularly important site through which to mobilize war related public health projects because it was the most highly developed state institution in Puerto Rico. Officials referred to using the “machinery” of the school system as a way to administer a host of new reforms, assistance programs, and regulations. Within this context home economics teachers played a particularly central role in the organization of the JRC branches, generally serving as its local directors. Previously, home economics teachers had provided vocational education to girls, which continued to be central to the mission of the Red Cross. Female students were imagined as particularly important to the war effort and the modernization of Puerto Rico as future mothers and workers. Students received training in scientific forms of motherhood based upon a curriculum designed by Elsie Mae Willsey, a teacher from the United States.⁹⁰ These teachers developed fundraisers, selling goods that were produced by the vocational education students and collecting money to distribute to families in need. One of the main projects of the JRC became the distribution of these resources that was overseen by the teachers who were in charge of investigating which cases would receive the assistance. According to the Department of Education reports from this period, the JRC funds became an important form of social service that was widely embraced within local

⁹⁰ Elsie Mae Willsey, *Course of Study in Home Economics for the Elementary and High Schools of Porto Rico* (San Juan, P.R.: Bureau of Supplies, Printing and Transportation, 1921). Grace J. Ferguson, *Home Making and Home Keeping, A Text Book for the First Two Years' Work in Home Economics in the Public Schools of Porto Rico* (San Juan, P.R.: Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1915). For Discussion of these program and others of the time see: Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010).

communities. The programs reveal a new space where social services were being provided within the schools and the changing role of some teachers in students lives.

With the end of World War I came the reorganization of the newly formed programs of the Red Cross in Puerto Rico. As in the United States the agency sought to transform its activities into a “peace-time” program that would provide social services for soldiers and their families.⁹¹ In response to these changes, United States officials from the agency were sent to Puerto Rico to determine a new course of action. It was during this period that Beatriz Lassalle first began working alongside social workers from the United States who were sent to develop social programs for soldiers and their families. One of the social workers sent by the Red Cross to Puerto Rico, Lena Waters, suggested that Lassalle be put in charge of the extension of the already successful Junior Red Cross.⁹² In this role Lassalle also was exposed to the practice and politics of new forms of professional social work and social investigation and learned about the fields role in modernizing charity and humanitarian giving. She also heard about the newly formed New York School of Social Work after seeing an advertisement in an educational magazine from the U.S. Lassalle became convinced that receiving additional training in social work would help her work on the island and she suggested to her boss, the Commissioner of Education Paul G. Miller, that she be sent to the school to learn more about social work. He and the Red Cross administrators in Puerto Rico agreed and arranged for Lassalle to receive a scholarship from the Department of Education to travel to the U.S. to begin her professional studies in social work.

⁹¹ Beatriz Lassalle “Un poco mas historia sobre el trabajo social en Puerto Rico” *El Mundo*, October 11, 1935, 9.

⁹² Beatriz Lassalle, Un poco mas historia...

Becoming a Social Worker: Social Work Methods and Training

In 1920, over twenty years after her first educational experience in the United States, Beatriz Lassalle returned to New York to be trained as a professional social worker. As an educator with years of experience, she enrolled at the New York School of Social Work (NYSW) during a moment when social work was in the midst of a radical transformation as social workers worked to lay claim to new professional identities and to claim that it was skilled labor.⁹³ For the schools directors this project rested on instructing students in scientific “case work,” a form of administering relief based upon interviewing clients and analyzing cases using particular methods and protocols based on new social scientific criteria. The school drew this method in particular from the teachings and writings of social worker Mary Richmond, whose book *Social Diagnosis* outlined how proper social work was the result of careful casework and investigation by those with professional training.⁹⁴ The NYSSW’s goal was to professionalize social work through its curriculum, providing certificates to its graduates. Students not only studied

⁹³ For more on the development of the New York School of Social Work see: Elizabeth G. Meier, *A History of the New York School of Social Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), Ronald A. Feldman and Sheila B. Kamerman, *The Columbia University School of Social Work: A Centennial Celebration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), Columbia University and CUSSW Alumni Association, *The Columbia University School of Social Work: A History of Social Pioneering: Proceedings of the First Oral History Day for Entering Students* (New York, NY: Columbia University School of Social Work, 1986). Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁹⁴ Mary Ellen Richmond, *Social Diagnosis* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1955), Elizabeth N. Agnew, *From Charity to Social Work: Mary E. Richmond and the Creation of an American Profession* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

the newest methods of social work in the program but also worked in an apprenticeship program, following seasoned caseworkers into the field.⁹⁵

During Lassalle's studies at the NYSW the faculty was mainly composed of specialists in sociology, psychology and economics that taught a student body made up mainly of white women. However, the school had also been impacted by United States colonial, imperial, and military ventures in different ways. There was a small group of international students, including students from Cuba and Japan attending around the same time Lassalle enrolled.⁹⁶ These students joined a small group of African American students, among whom were notable figures like Eugene Kinckle Jones, founder of the Urban League, a social welfare agency that helped black migrants in U.S. cities.⁹⁷ The leadership of the school also reflected the imperial ties embodied within it. One of the early directors of the school was Samuel Lindsay, a child welfare expert who had helped develop the colonial educational system in Puerto Rico.⁹⁸ Another faculty member and

⁹⁵ Two studies on the textual practices of social case files as discussed here: Mark Peel, *Miss Cutler and the Case of the Resurrected Horse: Social Work and the Story of Poverty in America, Australia, and Britain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012). Karen Whitney Tice, *Tales of Wayward Girls and Immoral Women: Case Records and the Professionalization of Social Work* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

⁹⁶ The school hosted international students from a variety of see different locations during this period, see: Ronald A. Feldmen and Sheila B. Kamerman. *The Columbia University School of Social Work: A Centennial Celebration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁹⁷ Eugene Kinckle Jones later founded the School of Social Work at Howard University in addition to being one of the lead organizers of the Urban League, an organization dedicated to advocating on behalf of African American communities right to social welfare provisions. Felix L. Armfield, *Eugene Kinckle Jones: The National Urban League and Black Social Work, 1910-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

⁹⁸ Samuel Lindsay also published a number of articles about charitable work in Puerto Rico and toured the United States discussing the need for United States benevolence towards the island after the Spanish American War. Lindsay was an important political figure in the United States because who had long agitating for the end of child labor as a founder of the National Child Labor Committee. He also drafted the first proposal for a federal Children's Bureau, and when the agency was finally created in 1912 and was offered its directorship, which he declined.

future director of the school, Walter Pettit, had worked in the colonial administration of the Philippines and spoke Spanish. Pettit became a close friend and mentor of Lassalle and kept in touch with her about her activities in Puerto Rico, and he traveled to the island in future years.⁹⁹

A large part of Lassalle's training at the NYSW was received through hands on and practical experience working in settlement houses. Much of the social work in the city occurred in these agencies, which targeted immigrant and migrant communities for assimilation and Americanization.¹⁰⁰ When Lassalle arrived she took trips to visit a number of these social agencies and soon found that her fluency in Spanish made her a much needed and welcomed expert within the settlement houses and charity organizations. The Puerto Rican and Cuban population in the city had continued to grow since the Spanish American War and the U.S. occupation of both islands. Many migrant workers faced harsh conditions in the United States and sought assistance in settlement houses that were unprepared to assist Spanish speakers. While in New York Lassalle worked as a volunteer at the Brooklyn Board of Charities for three months and for the Associated Charities in New York for a similar amount of time.¹⁰¹ As a social worker in training, the majority of cases that she dealt with involved migrant Spanish speaking workers who sought to navigate United States social agencies. From the beginning, the social issues that resulted from displacement were central to Lassalle's practice of social

⁹⁹ Denoyers, "Servir, divisa de una vida."

¹⁰⁰ For more on the history of the settlement house movement in the United States see: Walter Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America* (New York: Free Press, 1999). Ruth Hutchinson Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement House Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992). Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in the American Settlement House Movement, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

¹⁰¹ Denoyers, "Servir, divisa de una vida"

work. She participated in innovating forms of casework that were used with these urban migrants. Lassalle's work in the United States suggests how one of the particularities of colonial social work in Puerto Rico was that those that were trained were integrated into the profession through university attendance in the United States and inevitably through casework with migrant communities. Therefore, the people who ended up implementing social work practice in Puerto Rico almost always had first hand experience with social assistance programs for Puerto Rican migrants, and their knowledge about migration shaped their practices back to the island.

Returning to Brooklyn as a social investigator twenty years after her first visit gave her an opportunity to assess the transformations occurring in the city. She became more acutely aware of the class and racial divisions that were developed within the Puerto Rican community in New York. She later wrote that her experience "allowed (her) to see how Puerto Ricans in the United States live and the indifference with which they are treated by their countryman, who have come to occupy advantageous positions and looked down on them."¹⁰² She chastised wealthy Puerto Ricans for turning their backs on those in the migrant community that were less fortunate. She traveled between the NYSW classrooms in Manhattan, close to where many elite Puerto Rican "Hispanos" lived, to her settlement house work in Brooklyn where the working class community had settled.¹⁰³ Witnessing these tensions also sparked Lassalle's interest in advocating for the obligations of the wealthy in the United States to support reform, social justice, and welfare. She began to see this as particularly important in the context of the displacement

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ See: Jesús Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* (New York: Arno Press, 1975). Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

migrant workers navigated. She later brought these experiences and her knowledge of the New York Puerto Rican community and social agencies to bear on her work in the development of social institutions back on the island. Her own experience as a student and worker in social agencies in New York also conditioned her perceptions of the world that migrants were entering as they moved between island and mainland. When she returned one of her main concerns became thinking about how migration impacted Puerto Rican communities in both locations.

After her return to Puerto Rico in 1920, Lassalle dove into a project of reorganizing the agencies of the Junior Red Cross on the island. Her work centered on modernizing charity through the use of investigation and casework methods that she had learned at the NYSW. She was given the title of “Executive Secretary” of the JRC and nearly free reign to create the types of social programs that she wanted. She used her training in social work in the United States to redefine the role of the agency in the public education system. She worked to expand the activities of the organization, paying close attention to the way that child welfare and public health measures could be initiated through the system of education. Shortly after her return to Puerto Rico she began training numerous other Puerto Rican students in social work methods. Some of her students used their training as agents working for the insular government on a variety of state sponsored public health projects. Within the Department of Education, others used these new skills to further develop child health projects linked to the activities of the Junior Red Cross. These social welfare methods worked to continue expanding the role of the social worker and public health nurse beyond the boundaries of the school, clinic, or hospital, and into the communities and homes of clients and patients.

The Children's Bureau

Around the same time that Lassalle returned from the New York School of Social Work, her boss, Paul G. Miller, succeeded in getting the United States federal government interested in evaluating child welfare programs on the island. Miller had contacted Julia Lathrop, the director of the Children's Bureau of the Department of Labor, a federal agency created in 1912 to protect children and their mothers.¹⁰⁴ The maternalist reformers who directed the Children's Bureau argued that children had the right to protected childhoods that included access to a safe home and economic support. They created standards of normative homes and families grounded in the idea that male breadwinners should support nuclear families. When these fathers failed to support their families, reformers argued that the state had a responsibility to provide assistance to their children and wives.¹⁰⁵ The agency was the result of decades of child welfare activism led by progressive era social reformers, many of who were active in the urban settlement house movement. Julia Lathrop had worked at Hull House in Chicago for a number of years before being named chief of the Children's Bureau for ten years between 1912 and 1922. Lathrop oversaw the agencies work investigating child and maternal welfare by directing a number of social investigations, writing social policies and legislation, and beginning the implementation of these policies throughout the United States.

¹⁰⁴ Kriste Lindenmeyer, *A Right to Childhood: The U.S. Children's Bureau and Child Welfare, 1912-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), Jane Addams and Alice Hamilton, *My Friend, Julia Lathrop* (New York: Macmillan, 1935).

¹⁰⁵ Kriste Lindenmeyer, *A Right to Childhood*.

Nevertheless after WWI the Children's Bureau agents became concerned about how, or if, the provisions they were securing in the United States would be extended to the U.S. territories and colonial possessions. There was no clear precedent for whether social policies would be extended as the initial Sheppard and Towner Act of 1921, which had allocated money for maternal welfare programs didn't included coverage of the island.¹⁰⁶ Many of the Children's Bureau's members were critical of the way that colonial administrators had handled their work in the possessions and believed that there could be a better group of officials in charge of this work.¹⁰⁷ It was in this spirit that the agencies leaders had mentioned in numerous bulletins and discussions that some sort of investigation should be made into the conditions in Puerto Rico. By 1920 Paul G. Miller wrote to Julia Lathrop about the possibility of conducting a study of child welfare in Puerto Rico.¹⁰⁸ Miller hoped the investigation would result in the allocation of more federal relief funds to Puerto Rico.

Lathrop responded by sending one of the Children's Bureau's seasoned social workers and researchers, Estelle B. Hunter, to the island on a brief investigatory trip. Hunter had experience working in the settlement house movement and had conducted numerous social scientific studies of infant mortality for the bureau.¹⁰⁹ She reported back that the island was in dire need of child welfare reform and suggested that Beatriz Lassalle would be an ideal candidate to direct the Puerto Rican side of the investigation

¹⁰⁶ This letter was published in the Children's Bureau Annual Report of 1920.

¹⁰⁷ Katharine S. Bullard, "Children's Future, Nation's Future: Race, Citizenship, and the United States Children's Bureau" in Dirk Schumann (ed), *Raising Citizens in the "Century of the Child": The United States and German Central Europe in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

¹⁰⁸ Children's Bureau Annual Report, 1920.

¹⁰⁹ Beatriz Lassalle, "Un poco mas sobre el trabajo social en Puerto Rico," *El Mundo*, October 11, 1935, 9.

because of her training in social work. The emphasis of the program as imagined by the Children's Bureau would be on how to create social welfare programs in Puerto Rico by diagnosing the island's needs and developing suggestions to the U.S. government. Miller and Lathrop decided that Lassalle should travel to Washington DC to meet with the Children's Bureau directors, study the agencies social investigations methods, and prepare a Puerto Rican program.¹¹⁰ The Children's Bureau planned to train Lassalle in their social science methods so she could develop studies and collect data they could use to produce a report on child welfare in Puerto Rico. She would have to conduct interviews and meet with local officials, as well as compile materials in Spanish and translate them into English. The agency viewed Lassalle as an important bridge between itself and local Puerto Rican charity groups, state agencies, and the communities she would study. The project rested on her ability to gain data similar to the materials that they had collected in their studies in the United States and to present them to the Children's Bureau agents.

The Children's Bureau also decided that its investigation would be coupled with the administration of a "Children's Year" in Puerto Rico. In the United States the Children's Year program had begun in 1918, during the war, as a way of "stimulating and coordinating public and volunteer effort for child welfare."¹¹¹ Its main goal was to advocate for "public protection of maternity and infancy, mother's care for older children, enforcement of child-labor laws and free schooling for all children of school age, recreation for children and youth, abundant, decent, protected from all form of

¹¹⁰ Lassalle, "Un poco mas sobre el trabajo social en Puerto Rico."

¹¹¹ Helen Valeska Bary. *Child Welfare in the Insular Possessions of the United States. Part I* (Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, Children's Bureau, 1923).

exploitation.”¹¹² Among the activities conducted during the Children’s Year was weighing and measuring of children, the creation of recreation activities, and doctors and dentists visits in local schools and newly formed public health centers. The agency also distributed large amounts of educational literature and “inaugurated a correspondence extension course on scientific motherhood.”¹¹³ The goal of these projects in the United States and Puerto Rico was to lay the foundation for separate state sponsored institutions dedicated to child health and hygiene.

Over the course of multiple stays in Washington DC, Lassalle took part in the daily activities of Children’s Bureau representatives, including Julie Lathrop, Grace Abbot, Emma Lunberg, and Katherine Lenroot.¹¹⁴ The agency chose Helen Bary, to oversee the Puerto Rican project and write up the final report on Puerto Rico. Bary was a former suffrage leader and child welfare advocate who was the director of publications of the agency.¹¹⁵ Lathrop was one of her mentors but she did not get along well with Grace Abbot or Katherine Lenroot, the other women who held leadership roles in the administration.¹¹⁶ The Children’s Bureau sent Bary to Puerto Rico with Lassalle where she met with colonial officials and discussed the development of the program. In addition

¹¹² Bary, *Child Welfare in the Insular Possessions of the United States*.

¹¹³ Training in scientific motherhood in the United States, is discussed in: Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930*. Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1994. Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

¹¹⁴ Lassalle, Un poco mas sobre el trabajo social en Puerto Rico.”

¹¹⁵ There is an oral history with Helen Bary about her that discusses her work in Puerto Rico and the writing of the report. Bary went on to be one of the architects of Social Security legislation in the United States. Helen Valeska Bary and Jacqueline K. Parker, *Labor Administration and Social Security: A Woman's Life* (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, University of California/Berkeley, 1974).

¹¹⁶ Helen Valenska Bary and Jacqueline Parker, *Labor Administration and Social Security, A Woman's Life*.

to writing up the report about the Children's Bureau's work, Bary also published numerous articles about her experiences in Puerto Rico in the popular press.

While Helen Bary wrote little directly about Beatriz Lassalle, in two telling moments she revealed a bit about their relationship. In an oral history conducted with Bary late in her life, an interviewer asked her about Lassalle, who she named as being an assistant on the Children's Bureau project in Puerto Rico,

Bary: Beatriz had been in the States before. She had had some contact with social agencies. She had a touch of colored blood. Apparently in the States she had met with prejudice on that account, which made her highly sensitive on any possible topic that would reflect on race prejudice. At times it created situations that were a bit difficult.

Parker (Interviewer): Even in Puerto Rico?

Bary: In connection with some North Americans. Now, in general, Puerto Rico is fairly oblivious to the color line. The mayor of San Juan was a black man; the principals of most of the schools were colored; the population of the island had a large admixture of colored blood. The census figures were not indicative of the color line as we would draw it in the North. Some families had the tradition of being white, and maybe they had chocolate-colored members; some families were considered colored who had members that could pass as white. It was certainly not like the northern way of drawing a color line.

This exchange hints at the way that Lassalle was treated by the United States reformers she encountered on the mainland and island, where she was perceived as a person of African descent. It also suggests that the experience of dealing with racial discrimination in the United States in particular, according to Bary, had made her "sensitive" to "race prejudice." Bary was a northern liberal whose family had been abolitionists and that openly spoke against racial prejudice; however, she also strongly believed that Puerto Ricans needed the tutelage of the United States to become modern and civilized. She

expressed concern in this quote, as well as in the resulting report published by the Children's Bureau, about racial "mixing" and the lack of a clear "color line" in Puerto Rico.

Lassalle also surfaced in a fictionalized narrative that Bary published in the *Atlantic Monthly* about Puerto Rico's "Americanization" in the 1920s.¹¹⁷ The story focuses on a Puerto Rican woman who is both "modern" and "Americanized" who works in her community to build better roads to help develop the rural area. She faces great barriers and challenges in her work because of corrupt and inefficient local male political leaders. She is finally able to overcome these obstacles with the help of a handsome young "modern" man whom she marries. The protagonist of the story is named "Beatriz," and it's hard not to think that the vision of the modern woman that Bary centers in this narrative is not in some way modeled on her coworker and Puerto Rican guide, Lassalle. The romantic part of the story seems to be embellishment however, as Lassalle, like many other contemporary social welfare leaders, never married.

Bary's story also illustrates how in Puerto Rico the work of the Children's Bureau took on new meanings as the organization entered into imperial territory.¹¹⁸ The agencies leaders took a different stance towards the island, imagining it as a space that was in need of development and modernization. This was similar to how they thought "Americanizing" and incorporating "middle class Anglo Saxon family structures" would

¹¹⁷ Helen Bary published a number of articles under her pen name "Valenska Bari." See for example: Valenska Bari, "Gift of Tongues," *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 136 (Sept. 1925), 389-394.

¹¹⁸ Katharine S. Bullard, "Children's Future, Nation's Future."

best serve immigrants and communities of color.¹¹⁹ The Children's Bureau viewed the entire island as being in dire need of tutelage in their idea of proper United States domesticity. However, on the ground the agencies activities were not only shaped by United States officials, but also by Puerto Rican women like Lassalle. Lassalle and others worked to turn the modernization project into a space for local elite Puerto Rican women to participate in state formation through their work in social agencies. These women became increasingly involved in shaping what the rights and benefits of United States citizenship would look like for the island's population. The activities of the Children's Year reflected as space where the visions of United States and Puerto Rican female reformers collided, as they shaped a new colonial social welfare system in Puerto Rico.

Before Bary and Lassalle had left Washington, DC for Puerto Rico the Children's Bureau decided that the Children's Year activities should be closely tied to the peacetime program of the Red Cross. They selected Red Cross worker Knowlton Mixer to direct the Puerto Rican program, and he was accompanied by his wife Margaret, a trained social worker. Knowlton Mixer went on to document his Puerto Rican experiences in a book about social conditions of the island.¹²⁰ In addition to Mixer, the Red Cross assigned Kathleen D'Olier, a nurse who had worked in a reconstruction program in Greece after

¹¹⁹ For a discussion of the impact of "Americanization" as a Children's Bureau policy see: Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995). Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010), Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), Geoff K. Ward, *The Black Child-Savers: Racial Democracy and Juvenile Justice* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

¹²⁰ Knowlton Mixer wrote a book about Puerto Rico after his visit. See: Knowlton Mixer, *Porto Rico; History and Conditions Social, Economic and Political* (New York: Macmillan Co, 1926).

the war creating child welfare programs.¹²¹ Lassalle was the main intermediary between these agents and the offices of the Children's Bureau, Red Cross, and Junior Red Cross. She also worked to link the activities of these agencies to local charitable work already being conducted by Puerto Rican women. The goal of the collaborative efforts of these agencies was for Bary to write up a final report for the Children's Bureau and the United States government, in the hopes that more funding and programs for children would be administered to the island.

The Children's Year Program

*"The 'family' and the 'home' do not exist among the poorer classes of Porto Ricans in the sense in which these terms are used ordinarily."*¹²² Helen Bary

When Bary and Lassalle arrived in Puerto Rico they began their work by having a series of meetings with government officials. The first step of the project was to take stock of the child welfare activities already underway as a part of both state activities and private charities. Lassalle used the connections with state officials she acquired working in the Department of Education and suffrage movement. She linked the activities of the Children's Year to the work already conducted by these women in Puerta de Tierra, a working class neighborhood outside the urban center of San Juan.¹²³ This area had long

¹²¹ Lavinia L. Dock, *History of American Red Cross Nursing* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1922).

¹²² Helen Valeska Bary. *Child Welfare in the Insular Possessions of the United States. Part I* (Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, Children's Bureau, 1923), 63.

¹²³ Teresita Martínez Vergne, *Shaping the Discourse on Space: Charity and Its Wards in Nineteenth-Century San Juan, Puerto Rico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), Félix V Matos Rodríguez, *Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1820-1868* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), José Enrique Flores Ramos, *Eugenesia, higiene pública y alcanfor para las pasiones: la*



Figure 1.2. “Baby Clinic at a School House” Bary, *Child Welfare in the Insular Possessions of the United States*

been the site of social reforms and interventions, under Spanish and United States rule. The community was largely made up working class families, most led by women including many of African descent. These women provided much of the service and caring labor that sustained San Juan the capital city and seat of political power of the colonial government. Scholars have documented how the neighborhood was racialized over the course of the nineteenth century under liberal Spanish policies that sought to

prostitución en San Juan de Puerto Rico, 1876-1919 (Hato Rey, P.R.: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 2006).

relocate workingwomen outside of the urban center.¹²⁴ Many of the laundresses, cooks and domestics that lived here had also been the targets of anti-prostitution policies before and after United States intervention. The Red Cross had also established their headquarters in Puerta de Tierra during World War I and had directed a major campaign targeting public health and venereal disease at the Las Casas Military Base in nearby Santurce.¹²⁵

The Children's Year overlapped with other public health measures undertaken by the Puerto Rican government after World War I. In particular, this work intersected with that of tropical medicine experts like military surgeon Bailey K. Ashford, who had led a long campaign to eradicate hookworm and anemia on the island.¹²⁶ In Puerto Rico, as in other colonial regions, the development of public health was closely tied to the militarization of empire.¹²⁷ Ashford organized an Institute of Tropical Medicine in San Juan during the 1920s with the collaboration of Columbia University. This institution worked in close collaboration with the insular governments Department of Sanitation, and its work reflected a larger trend towards the medicalization of social problems by

¹²⁴ Félix V Matos Rodríguez, *Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1820-1868*.

¹²⁵ Félix V Matos Rodríguez, *Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1820-1868*, Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

¹²⁶ Bailey K. Ashford, *A Soldier in Science: The Autobiography of Bailey K. Ashford* (New York: W. Morrow and Company, 1934), Bailey K. Ashford and Pedro Gutiérrez Igaravidez, *Uncinariasis (Hookworm Disease) in Porto Rico: A Medical and Economic Problem* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911), José Amador, "Redeeming the Tropics: Public Health and National Identity in Cuba, Puerto Rico and Brazil, 1890-1940" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008). Isabel Cordova, "Transitioning: The History of Childbirth in Puerto Rico, 1948-1990s" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2009).

¹²⁷ Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), Alexandra Stern, *Eugenic Nation Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), José Enrique Flores Ramos, *Eugenesis, higiene pública y alcanfor para las pasiones: la prostitución en San Juan de Puerto Rico, 1876-1919* (Hato Rey, P.R.: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 2006).

colonial officials on the island who sought social reform through public health enforcement. One of the main officials of this agency, Antonio Fernos Isern, who would later become the head of the Department of Health, became particularly interested in social services, encouraging the development of the field and later writing about his encouragement of creating social service programs.¹²⁸

The Children's Bureau and other public health measures grappled with the social transformations in urban neighborhoods in the 1920s. Over thirty years of United States imperialism and corporate agricultural, land consolidation had resulted in a massive dispossessed and seasonally unemployed internal migrant population. The island's industries were regularly paralyzed by strikes led by dissatisfied workers and labor organizers who challenged the colonial authorities and corporations.¹²⁹ During this decade, it was impossible to ignore that the island's people were increasingly impoverished and landless. The economy was in crisis long before the Great Depression hit its shores. Rural migrants moved towards the cities and filled working class neighborhoods like Puerta de Tierra with a fresh population in search of work and homes. Local state officials from the United States and the island wrestled with how to respond. The Children's Bureau report, and the events surrounding the data collection and writing of the project offer a window into how reformers sought to answer this question through

¹²⁸ Antonio Fernos Isern wrote an article in *El Mundo* in which he documented his participation in the social work, where he goes as far as saying that he was really the founder of social work in Puerto Rico.

¹²⁹ Blanca G. Silvestrini, *Los trabajadores puertorriqueños y el partido socialista, 1932-1940* (Río Piedras: Editorial Universitaria, 1979), James L. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

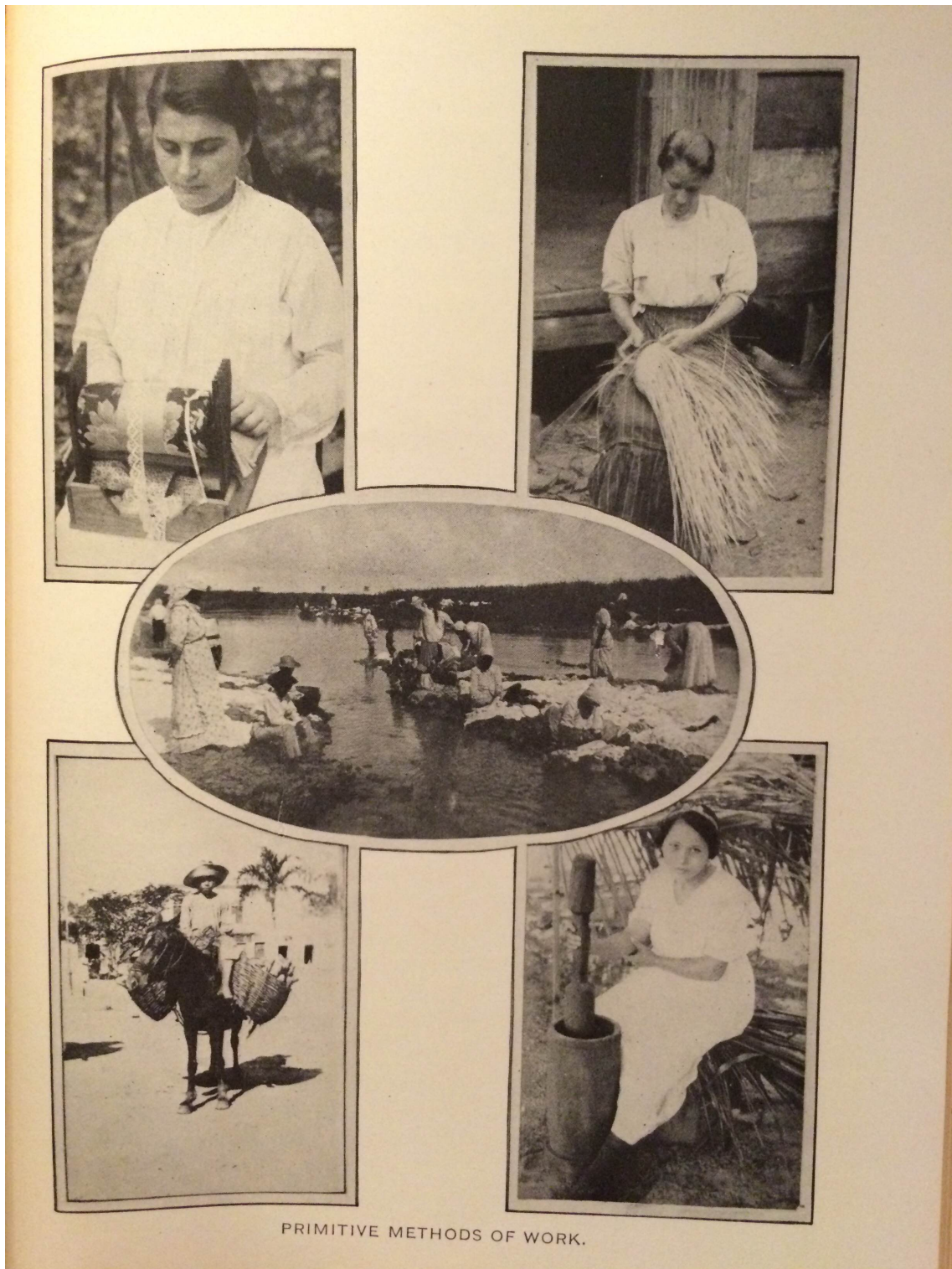
the creation of new state sponsored social welfare programs. Concern over migration figured into the heart of the projects of reformers, as policies increasingly targeted homelessness, vagrancy, and the movement of rural people into slums surrounding metropolitan areas.¹³⁰

The social transformations of the 1920s also profoundly impacted women, leading many to enter the waged labor force. Many working class women were active in growing labor and socialist organizations.¹³¹ Some of the elite women who Lassalle worked with in suffrage groups joined forces with these organized working women in the fight for women's rights. Among them was one of Lassalle's close friends, Ricarda Lopez de Ramos Casellas, a socialist feminist who pushed elite suffrage leaders towards a more inclusive vision.¹³² Alongside her, Lassalle participated in the suffrage movements transition to a more class inclusive group called the "Liga Social Sufragista." However, Lassalle's political affiliations did not align with the Republican or socialist political groups like those of Lopez. The creation of this broader coalition was short lived and revealed the class and race tensions in society; the alliance crumbled when elite women, including Lassalle pushed forward a suffrage bill that began by granting suffrage only to

¹³⁰ Kelvin A. Santiago- Valles, *"Subject People" and Colonial Discourses: Economic Transformation and Social Disorder in Puerto Rico, 1898-1947* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). Rosa E. Carrasquillo, *Our Landless Patria Marginal Citizenship and Race in Caguas, Puerto Rico, 1880-1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

¹³¹ Norma Valle Ferrer, *Luisa Capetillo: Pioneer Puerto Rican Feminist* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), Luisa Capetillo and Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, *A Nation of Women: An Early Feminist Speaks Out: Mi opinión sobre las libertades, derechos y deberes de la mujer* (Houston, Tex: Arte Público Press, 2004). Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

¹³² Sandra A. Enríquez Seiders, *Ricarda López de Ramos Casellas: tizas, conciencia y sufragio* (Colombia: Ediciones Callejón, 2006).



PRIMITIVE METHODS OF WORK.

Figure I.3. "Primitive Methods of Work," Bary, *Child Welfare in the Insular Possessions of the United States*

literate women.¹³³ However, in the early 1920s, when the Children's Bureau activities were taking place, there was a political push towards uniting all women. It is likely that reformers used public health spaces like the Red Cross clinics as platforms for the suffrage cause. During this period Lassalle agitated for suffrage both through her work in the halls of legislature and on the "porches of the working classes."¹³⁴

One of the main projects of the Children's Year was to organize the activities of women already doing charitable work under the umbrella of the state. The work of these professional women reflected larger transformations in how reformers' ideas about the role and labor of women and children in a modernizing society. Reformers argued that women's roles mothers sustained families, communities, and nations and that this labor required proper education. If women were trained in scientific forms of motherhood they could produce healthy and productive citizens. This shifting idea about women's work had transformative consequences in society and modernization of maternalist politics can be traced through all of the activities of the Children's Year. The main goal of the program was to teach new forms of "mother-work," both to professional and working class women.¹³⁵

The Children's Year programs were directed by groups of volunteers trained by Lassalle to work on a few different individual projects. However, the overarching aim of this educational project was to introduce and spread the idea that charity was a science,

¹³³ María de F Barceló Miller, *La lucha por el sufragio femenino en Puerto Rico, 1896-1935* (San Juan, P.R.: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales, 1997), Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency*.

¹³⁴ Angela Negrón Muñoz, *Mujeres de Puerto Rico: desde el período de colonización hasta el primer tercio del siglo XX* (San Juan, P.R.: Imprenta Venezuela, 1935).

¹³⁵ The term mother-work I take here from: Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

and volunteers laid claim to new roles performing social work as they participated in the Children's Year activities. Lassalle's training program also modeled the perspective that casework and scientific forms of record keeping could provide more efficient services through individual diagnosis and treatment rather than through a blanket approach. These activities also demonstrated to the insular government the type of work that social work could do in the community.¹³⁶ The state responded by encouraging a wider breadth of charitable work to come under the umbrella of the state. The Children's Year program resulted in an increase in women's interest in public health related careers while simultaneously urging government agencies to hire professional women to develop social service programs.

The first activity developed by Lassalle as a part of the Children's Year was a fresh air camp for children from Puerta de Tierra in the rural town of Barranquitas. During the first of these camps there were one hundred children selected to participate.¹³⁷ The children, many of whom were considered at risk of becoming juvenile delinquents or contracting tuberculosis, were taken to the mountains for a health focused summer camp. At the camp they were instructed in "hygienic" principles, including proper forms of eating, playing, and taking care of themselves. They were also examined by doctors and dentists and given medical treatments. The camp garnered a lot of local interest from local charitable women who assisted Lassalle in its direction and numerous articles were also published about it in US magazine. Lassalle enlisted a variety of society women to

¹³⁶ This is similar to the process described in: Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

¹³⁷ Bary, *Child Welfare in the Insular Possessions*, 32.

help her with the project. One of the ironies of the project was that many of the children who were brought to the mountains came from families that had only recently migrated to the city from countryside. The camp served to illustrate the Children's Year's dedication to organizing the efforts of earlier charity movements in a new broader coalition directed by trained social workers.

The second project of the Children's Year was to revamp the Red Cross work to develop better social service programs. Knowlton Mixer and his wife Margaret worked to strengthen the "Home Services" program under a more robust "Family Welfare Bureau." The use of social work methods in the social service programs devised by the Red Cross was viewed by Mixer and Lassalle as representing a new form of state work in Puerto Rican communities. The experiment was touted by Mixer as the first implementation of "United States social services" in Puerto Rico. Mixer was particularly interested in developing programs for veterans and their families.¹³⁸ At the same time, the nurse Kathleen D'Olier built a new maternal and child health and hygiene clinic in Puerta de Tierra and directed a group of volunteers that oversaw an infant mortality prevention campaign. At the clinics the nurse and volunteers provided education in infant care, showed Children's Bureau films from the U.S., and distributed educational pamphlets. They also began a course for "little mothers," providing similar instruction to girls between the ages of twelve and fifteen. In addition D'Olier and Lassalle trained volunteer visiting nurses to use casework methods to follow up with clients who came to the clinics. These volunteers performed an early form of professional public health nursing. They collected information about the health and family backgrounds of patients at the

¹³⁸ Knowlton Mixer, *Porto Rico; History and Conditions Social, Economic and Political* (New York: Macmillan Co, 1926).

clinic, including weight and height information about all of the children. The case file information was used to help determine what types of interventions should be made, or financial assistance given. Sometimes these cases resulted in multiple visits by the visiting nurse to the homes of the client over the course of months or years. In these clinics volunteers developed and administered new categories for labeling and organizing people as they extend the role of the public health official through “home visits” made by “visiting nurses”¹³⁹

The extant Junior Red Cross program also oversaw similar work targeting children’s health in the public education system. Home economics teachers expanded their work by training students in modern ideas of caring and mothering. This program was similar to the “Americanizing” curriculum administered to immigrants in the United States in the same years.¹⁴⁰ The teachers continued to direct a gender segregated vocational education program that focused on teaching girls about how to perform care work. The JRC also created additional programs in physical education for boys and girls. Students were also enlisted to participate in after school public sanitation drives, including latrine inspections, in their own communities as a part of the campaign to end hookworm. School programs continued to be a main site of social service related projects directed by reformers.

The Children’s Year directors also developed and administered three surveys that examined potential applicants for social services. The first survey was of “abandoned

¹³⁹ Sarah Lane “Social Service Activities of the Department of Health,” *Porto Rico Journal of Tropical Medicine*, October 1924.

¹⁴⁰ Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

mothers” and there were two additional surveys on “homeless” children, the first focused on boys and the second on girls.¹⁴¹ The agency had used surveys in the United States and here they began a new project to collect data about women and children on the island. The first project, the census of abandoned mothers was conducted by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. As mentioned earlier, this organization had a long history of regulating working class women’s lives in their campaigns against prostitution and formation of anti-vice neighborhood police forces.¹⁴² The collaboration between the WCTU and the Children’s Bureau illustrates how older forms of social regulation came under the umbrella of the state, providing the data that was used to initiate new forms of regulation and surveillance by social welfare officials and public health clinics. Newer social welfare programs were often grafted onto older reform projects, continuing older forms of intervention under new organizations. Through their work on the census the focus of these reformers turned from “prostitutes” to “abandoned mothers” as the main cause of social problems and need for reform during the 1920s. This reflected a transformation in the language used by social reformers to discuss working class women and their sexuality.

Bary’s discussion of the census of abandoned mothers in the final Children’s Bureau report also reflected how she attempted to make sense of Puerto Rican motherhood in racial terms and in comparison to her understanding of the family and its connections to race and history in the United States. In the report, she discussed how the

¹⁴¹ Helen Valeska Bary, *Child Welfare in the Insular Possessions of the United States. Part I, Part I* (Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, Children’s Bureau, 1923).

¹⁴² Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), José Enrique Flores Ramos, *Eugenesis, higiene pública y alcanfor para las pasiones: la prostitución en San Juan de Puerto Rico, 1876-1919* (Hato Rey, P.R.: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 2006).

history of slavery in Puerto Rico had led to fewer marriages and more of a matrilineal family structure than in the United States. She begins by describing the Puerto Rican population as different than in the United States, stating that “while some families have prided themselves upon preserving their blood unmixed the population in general is a product of the mixture of races.”¹⁴³ She repeatedly highlights the difference between Puerto Rican society and white family structures in the United States. She also makes broader racial claims by claiming that the “mild climate” in Puerto Rico has created situations “relieving the parents of a responsibility taken for granted among northern races.” She also states that “the former condition of slavery or dependence with its attendant irresponsibility for self-support and its tendencies towards irregular unions.” Here suggested that the tropical climate of Puerto Rico had resulted in a differential attitude towards parenting as well as a general idea that families in Puerto Rico had been shaped by slavery. She links her interpretation of the racial politics of Puerto Rico to the high rates of paternal abandonment, insinuating that Puerto Rican men’s failure to support their families is to blame for poverty in local communities. She also argues that the “prevailing opinion of the women that made this survey” was that the “basic trouble was economic conditions” and the “long periods of unavoidable idleness with its breaking up of regularity and good habits and its hardships...”¹⁴⁴ Here the lack of steady work, through which the father can rid himself of “idleness” and be a proper breadwinner, are depicted as the reason for abandonment.

¹⁴³ Children’s Bureau Report, 3.

¹⁴⁴ Children’ Bureau Report, 64.

In the Children's Bureau report Bary also discusses six "typical cases" from the census of abandoned mothers which are meant to "help visualize the situations" described in the report.¹⁴⁵ These descriptions reveal some of the main concerns of those that had collected the data about these women, listing their first names and ages, along with marital status, number and ages of children, the location of the father of the children if known, as well as how the woman was supporting herself or who was financially supporting her and her children. The women ranged in age from 22 to 30 and had between one and four children. Three out of six of the women were working, one in the tobacco industry, another as a laundress, and the last as a seamstress. The infidelity and gambling of a few of the men is mentioned in the brief descriptions of case files, something the reformers chose to highlight in the data they presented.

One of the other important topics that arises in the sample cases is how migration to the United States has led to parental abandonment and lack of support in some of these cases. Two of the men highlighted in the study are described as having migrated to New York City in search of work, and therefore being unable to support their families. One of the cases states,

*Dolores, Aged 29, married to a man who worked in an office, has three children- 7, 6, and 3 years of age. Her husband had deserted her two years before. She and her mother made blouses, and with difficulty supported the family. The Red Cross has located the man in New York, and he sent a little help. He said he went north to get better opportunities, but had not earned enough to bring the family north.*¹⁴⁶

In this case the Red Cross had actually stepped into a new role, using their networks of information in the United States to locate the seamstress's husband. This story also

¹⁴⁵ Children's Bureau Report, 64.

¹⁴⁶ Children's Bureau Report, 64.

suggests how migration was already shaping Puerto Rican communities and families.

Using connections in the United States, social agencies in Puerto Rico were increasingly able to find out information about migrants that had left for the United States. They arranged for money and resources to be sent back in the form of remittances to family

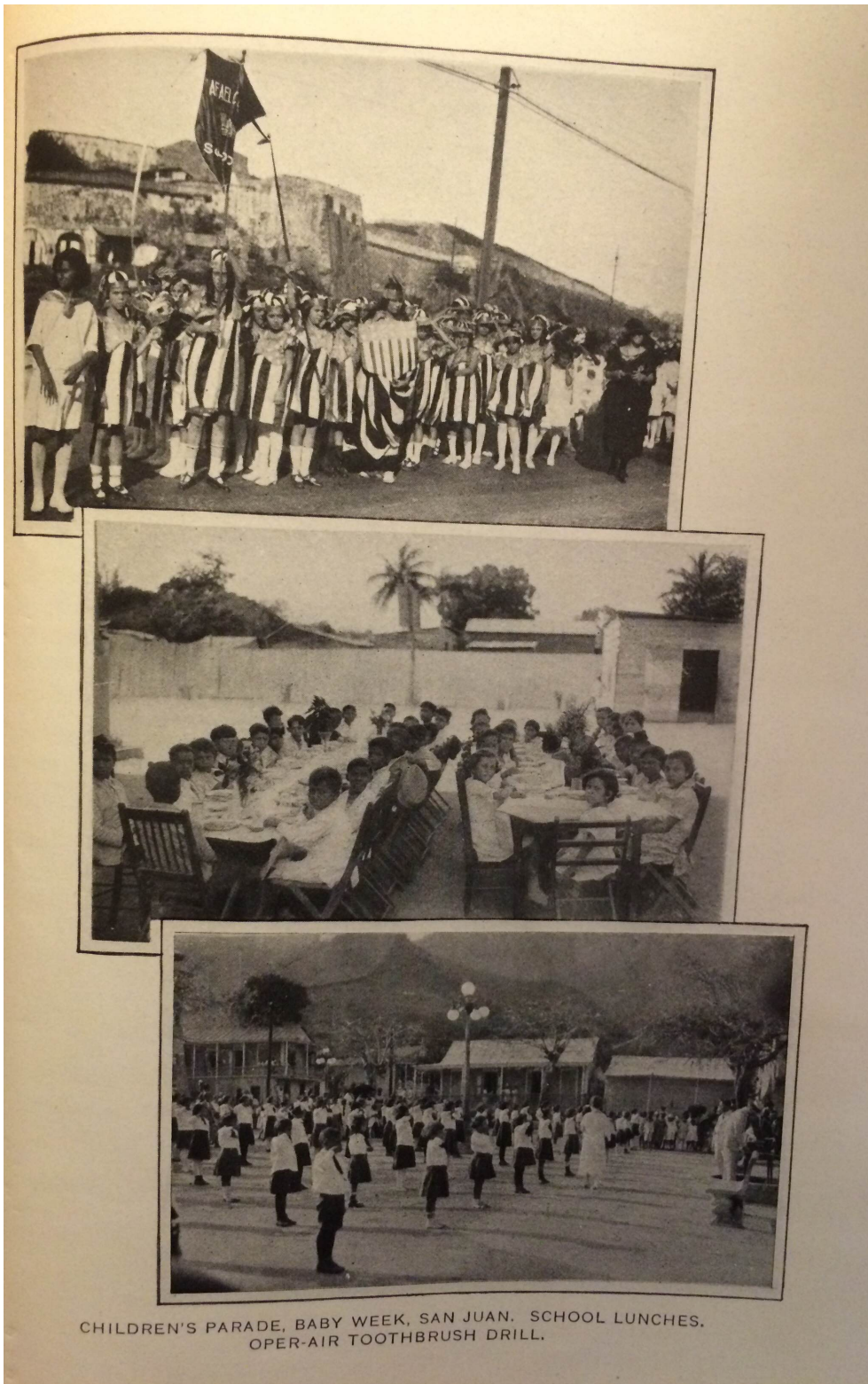


Figure I.4. "Children's Parade, Baby Week, San Juan. School Lunches, Open-Air Toothbrush Drill," Bary, *Child Welfare in the Insular Possessions of the United States*

members on the island. The roots of what would become a lasting practice of linking island and mainland families through social service agencies can be seen in the work conducted with these early cases.

The other two surveys on “homeless” children were initiated partially in response to often quoted statistic recounted in a popular study on Puerto Rico by Fred K. Fleagle that cited were “10,000” homeless children on the island.¹⁴⁷ Reformers viewed these children as potential delinquents and the Children’s Bureau directed the census of homeless children in three major cities: San Juan, Ponce, and Mayaguez. Beatriz Lassalle was chosen to direct these studies in and met with representatives of the insular police force, who gave her lists of children that had been reported as homeless. The children were later interviewed by caseworkers individually. The final report on children focused on how the group labeled “homeless” was actually composed of child laborers who worked mainly as servants in local homes. According to the final report, written up by Bary, “the great mass of homeless children work as servants in private families. Such servants are found in almost every household, and it is only by such work that many of these children escape starvation.”¹⁴⁸

The study focused on how these children were circulated throughout the city and that the large majority had been informally adopted to care for other children and do domestic work in urban households. The report argued that the circulation of child servants was “partly the outgrowth of slavery,” which suggested that the end of slavery itself had been “brought about at the request of Porto Ricans and was accomplished

¹⁴⁷ Fred K. Fleagle, *Social Problems in Porto Rico* (New York: Arno Press, 1975).

¹⁴⁸ Helen Valeska Bary, *Child Welfare in the Insular Possessions of the United States. Part I*, (Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, Children's Bureau, 1923), 55.

without bitterness or struggle.”¹⁴⁹ Moreover, Bary stated, “in large numbers of cases the former slaves continued to live as previously and their children grew up loosely attached to the family of the former owner.” Here the study reflects how Bary framed child servitude as the result of racial politics in Puerto Rico and the continued subservient spaces that people of African descent occupied. The study doesn’t relate how earlier charity organizations run by the state had explicitly worked to place their wards into private homes as servants and domestics. Previously, this had been the ideal result for the child, who was supported and protected by the family. Many children circulated through the city, living in these homes, because these practices of informal adoption were widespread.¹⁵⁰ The history of the role of charitable organizations in brokering these types of labor is left out of the study, despite the fact that women who had worked for these organizations were some of the main interlocutors of the Children’s Bureau in Puerto Rico.

A closer look at the studies Lassalle conducted reveals how child servants were imagined within the data collection for the two reports, on girls and boys respectively. These studies outlined a gendered division between the types of jobs that were given to homeless youth. In the report on homeless boys, 161 boys were “interviewed and investigated.”¹⁵¹ While many of the boys did not know where their parents were, some of them had working mothers, of whom “6 were washerwomen, 2 were seamstress, and 2 were cooks.” Among the boys “38 were servants, 104 were engaged in street trades, of

¹⁴⁹ Bary, *Child Welfare*.

¹⁵⁰ The intersection of child domestic work and circulation and the formation of social work practices has been explored in: Ann Shelby Blum, *Domestic Economies: Family, Work, and Welfare in Mexico City, 1884-1943* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

whom 24 were bootblacks, 18 newsboys, 7 street vendors, and 55 odd-jobbers; 6 were farm workers; and 13 were engaged in miscellaneous work.”¹⁵² Most had never attended school and were living a variety of conditions not considered proper “homes” by Lassalle and the researchers, such as staying at the homes of employers, with friends or in rented rooms or boarding houses, and 37 said they slept “anywhere.”

The report includes some “outlines of some interesting cases of homeless boys” that were interviewed for the study. There are eight boys profiled in the study, all were given racial classification directly following their first names, four are listed as “white” while the other four are listed as “colored.” In the case of one of the “white” children, Angel, who was eight years old, the case record documents his experience of rural to urban migration,

*Angel. White. Age 8. Angel has come from the country with his mother and older brother after the death of his father. The mother has found work at a hotel, but the boys are not allowed to stay with her. Angel had gone from house to house asking to be allowed to work for his board and room. He was taken in by a family to run errands and entertain the children, but was found to be too naughty and was discharged. He started the rounds a second time to find himself another home and had succeeded for the time being.*¹⁵³

In Angel’s case his mother’s job working at a hotel, probably as a domestic worker, did not allow her to keep her sons with her while she worked. Like many other children in the city, Angel sought work as a servant in San Juan from door to door looking for jobs.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Another case record reported that a teenager named Mario, who was labeled as “colored,” whose mother had passed away and was now living alone in the city.

Mario. Colored. Age 14. His mother was dead and his father was living in another town with another woman. After his mother’s death Mario had left home, and his sister had been placed out in a free foster home. He slept in an automobile which he was hired to look after, and ate at a restaurant. He was dirty and in rags.¹⁵⁴

The details of Mario’s case are interesting, because they include a condemnation of his father for abandoning the children, and also suggest that his sister may have been easier to place as a child servant in a foster home. The report highlighted how the situations of boys without parents could be more precarious than girls who were often quickly adopted in order to work in families.

In a second survey conducted by Lassalle of homeless girls, the gendered logics of child servitude continued to take center stage. According to the report “when a baby is born it is not unusual for the family to take a child of from 7 to 12 years of age who becomes the personal servant of the infant.”¹⁵⁵ These children were young girls that were taken into homes to be private servants and often grew up without access to education. According to the report “there has been no social conscience against this practice,” and “in many cases the child’s services are not really needed and she is taken into the house more in charity than for any selfish motive.”¹⁵⁶ Bary goes on to note that there are much higher rates of people of “modest means” who have more than three or four servants,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Bary, *Child Welfare*, 60.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

something that “people in the states, in similar conditions, would not expect.” She attributes this practice to “the race problem” which she argues “has had much to do with a careless attitude toward the education of these child servants, almost all of whom are of mixed blood.” Here she also interprets the racial history of Puerto Rico, stating that,

While Porto Rico was fortunately spared bitterness and civil war in the freeing of its slaves, a wide gulf has existed between the highly educated Porto Ricans of Spanish blood and continental culture and the simple, illiterate colored people. Toward those of mixed blood the islanders have been far more sympathetic than the people of the States have been. They have recognized individual merit and have accorded high honors to many colored persons, but they have considered it not unsuitable that the colored people should remain servants and therefore have thought it unnecessary for them to receive an education.¹⁵⁷

Bary’s interpretation of racial relations here is interesting in the contradictions it reflects and the tensions over racial meanings it reveals. She makes an argument that there are racial distinctions between Puerto Ricans based on race and groups all “colored people” together as “simple” and “illiterate.” However, she also argues that some “colored” Puerto Ricans have achieved status because of “individual merit.” The larger point of her analysis, however, that cultures of servitude and child circulation in Puerto Rico have maintained racial divisions and hierarchies of inequality, provides an interesting and more nuanced analysis of power and exclusion in Puerto Rican society than other colonial reports of the period.

The discussion of homeless girls in the report does not include particular case file information, although the process of collecting data about them is described. The collaboration between the reformers and insular police officials is highlighted here, as

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

“questionnaires were sent to all district chiefs of police asking them to list girls who had come under their observation as being in need of such care.”¹⁵⁸ Out of the 119 forms that were filled out there were investigations into particular conditions and interviews. According to the study “65 were classes as “homeless,” “vagabonds,” or “delinquent,” and 54 as “servants.”¹⁵⁹ The report mentions reformers concern with many living in “conditions of extreme moral hazard” and that some “had notations of “prostitute” or “often found on the streets at very late hours” in their files.¹⁶⁰ This concern with “moral delinquents” reflects how the girls’ experience was viewed very differently than that of the boys and was bound up in concerns over sexuality and morality that grew out of the earlier work of reformers and police to regulate working class women through restrictions on prostitution. The sexual politics of women’s work is also interesting in this study; the role of servant and prostitute are depicted as overlapping in the descriptions and conditions described in the report.

The Children’s Bureau’s argued that in order to eliminate “homelessness” one of the goals of social reforms should be to encourage compulsory education and to educate “public opinion” against practices of child servitude, particularly within elite women’s organizations.¹⁶¹ It suggests that cultural practices in Puerto Rico are to blame for practices of child circulation along with the inability of working women to take care of their children. The report also stresses tensions over whether children, regardless of race or class, should have a right to protected childhood. However, the work of the Children’s

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Bary, *Child Welfare*

Year sought to change these practices of child circulation and the role of charitable organizations in placing girls as domestics. They argued that instead new state institutions for children should be created with trained social workers, like Lassalle, at their helm.

These arguments may have come as a shock, or challenge, to the well off society women that supported the Children's Year project, and who were likely some of the main employers of these children. However, it is also just as likely that these elite women believed themselves to be enlightened employers who could instruct poor and middle class families in the proper way of keeping servants. Either way, tensions over the role and rights of Puerto Rican servants reflected a change in how popular understandings of childhood turned toward the idea that it should be protected by certain regulations and institutions. It also suggests some of the ways that social service agencies like the Children's Bureau and individuals like Beatriz Lassalle were beginning to make arguments that children who had previously been kept in the home as servants should attend school. They and their parents would increasingly be targeted as the subjects of social reforms and policy in subsequent years. These children were seen as needing education and guidance that could be provided through state programs that could curtail child circulation and servant labor. However, there were many contradictions within this work and vision. At the same time that the Children's Bureau sought to restrict local child labor practices, they directed the majority of the efforts of the program towards training girls and women in scientific care work in home economics programs reinforcing the role of women as caregivers, albeit to them ideally within their own homes. Thus, while the

idea of a protected childhood developed, the focus on a gendered division of caring labor in Puerto Rican communities remained steadfast.

Institutionalizing Social Welfare, Building the Welfare State

Before the Children's Bureau study was published, Helen Bary had the opportunity to return to the island on a follow-up trip where she investigated the results of the Children's Year activities. In her report, she described how many of the initiatives created by Lassalle were in the midst of being institutionalized and made permanent by the insular government. These changes had begun in 1923, directly after the Children's Year, when the insular government had decided to allocate \$60,000 for the prenatal and baby clinics. That year a "Social Welfare Service" was created in the Department of Health that oversaw work in the clinics. Lassalle was also enlisted to create a course in social work for students in the Normal School program at the University of Puerto Rico. The first cohort of sixty students participated in a two-week class in basic preparation for social work and attended numerous lectures given by public health professionals. Lassalle later recounted stories about driving around San Juan in a car to pick up the key lecturers in the program during the mornings before the course.¹⁶² According to Bary "the first half of the course was required and the second was elective, but no falling off in attendance occurred after the required period was completed."¹⁶³ As a result, social work methods

¹⁶² Lassalle, "Un poco mas sobre..."

¹⁶³ Bary, *Child Welfare*.



Figure 1.5.: Baby Clinic Funded by the Junior Red Cross

were widely institutionalized only three years after Lassalle had returned from her studies at the New York School of Social Work.

In addition to providing visiting nurse services these social workers also entered new roles as field researchers, collecting data through casework conducted with clients that was used by the government for further studies of poverty. They also developed large-scale social investigations of child welfare conditions, drawing upon methods developed by the Children's Bureau, to gather data and write reports. These reports were used as tools to argue for the creation of new social legislation and the building of social welfare institutions in upcoming years. In 1924 these efforts resulted in the reorganization of the social welfare activities in a new "Social Service Bureau," which

was augmented with the formation of a “Child Welfare Board” a year later. The “Child Welfare Board” was composed of members of the Departments of Justice, Agriculture, and Education as well as Lassalle and Angela Negron who was listed as a representative of the “Asociacion Feminista” as well as the secretary of the Bureau of Social Medicine and Puericulture. Also listed was suffrage leaders Isabel Andreau de Aguilar and Grace Lugo Vinas. Their presence on the board signaled a continued interconnection between women’s rights organizations and state sponsored social service administration.

By 1924 the Social Service Bureau within the Department of Health had a staff of eight people that included four social workers who were working in the field. According to one of the first reports of the organization there had been some tensions during the start of the organization as, “many believed it was primarily for the dispensing of charity while others believed that the social workers had supernatural ability to remedy all the evils that surround those masses of the less fortunate which are to be found in every country.”¹⁶⁴ The meaning of social work and the practices of casework developed would be negotiated within Puerto Rican agencies during these early years. Throughout this time, an emphasis on a scientific application of social services was central to the administration of the program, which also created a database of information about clients. According to the Department of Health, the Social Service Bureau developed a “complete record system” that “was immediately adopted and by this means it has been possible to have an exact understanding of each case, as to antecedents, heredity, family history, previous residence and conditions, social status, past and present, and the actual

¹⁶⁴ “Social Service Activities of the Department of Health” *Porto Rico Health Review: Official Bulletin of the Department of Health*, Vol 1, October 1925, no 4, 25.

economic situation.”¹⁶⁵ This work represented a major shift in the role of the Puerto Rican state in the lives of Puerto Ricans which had began collecting more and more data about poor families. The collection of case file information by the state and the bureaucratic management of this material were supervised by social workers. In addition, the practice of casework was also used throughout new government agencies that spread like a web throughout the island. The number of clinics where these practices were implemented expanded rapidly during the first years of the Social Service Bureau. According to reports from 1925 there were already dispensaries with social workers in San Juan, Santurce, Puerta de Tierra, Barrio Obero, Ponce, Mayaguez, Aguadilla, Caguas, Guayama, Juncos, Carolina, Comerio, and Villalba. The clinics treated between 320 and 71 patients each and the work reported included, house visits, care, instructions and demonstrations, visits of investigation, and prenatal and baby clinics. In Santurce alone there were 806 house visits reported by agents of the Department of Health, while high number were listed in other areas. The social workers continued to push the boundaries of public health work into the homes of Puerto Ricans throughout the 1920s.

Some of the types of cases that social workers dealt with in these dispensaries reflected earlier reformers concerns over regulation of the intimate relationships of Puerto Rican families. One of the main goals of the agency was “to bring about better social relationships and ideas of responsibility, as the number of unmarried and separated couples as well as the number of unmarried mothers is high among the poorer classes.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Sarah Lane “Social Service Activities of the Department of Health” *Porto Rico Journal of Tropical Medicine*. October 1924. *Porto Rico Health Review: Official Bulletin of the Department of Health*, Vol 1, San Juan Puerto Rico, September, 1925, No 3, 5.

¹⁶⁶ “Social Service Activities of the Department of Health” *Porto Rico Health Review: Official Bulletin of the Department of Health*, Vol 1, San Juan: PR, October 1925, No 4. 25.

Social workers intervened in particular familial cases and encouraged couples to get married. In one case where a man and woman who had come to the clinic were found to not be legally married social workers spoke with them about the “advisability of establishing legitimate relationships” and reported that they were later invited to the couples wedding.¹⁶⁷ The concern with marriage is reflected over and over, with reports stating, “many marriages have been affected through the influence of the social-welfare agents over the families with which they come in contact, and much stress has been brought to bear also upon the parents as to school attendance.”¹⁶⁸ The social workers targeted families that came to their clinics, often for medical reasons, for interventions into familial practices.

In addition, the impact of migration to the United States is also reflected in the reports of casework conducted with clients by the Social Service bureau. In one particular case, three “orphaned” children who were being taken care of by a grandmother were brought to a local Baby Clinic. These clinics were run as a part of the maternal health programs created by the social workers in the Department of Health. Here the agents discovered she was in financial difficulty and “could not pay her rent.”¹⁶⁹ The social workers found out that “the nearest relative was a brother in New York,” and he was “located through the Charity Organization Society of Brooklyn and was requested to help support the children.”¹⁷⁰ In response the young man did begin sending money back to the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid

¹⁶⁸“Social Service Activities of the Department of Health” *Porto Rico Health Review: Official Bulletin of the Department of Health*, Vol 1, San Juan: PR, October 1925, No 4.

¹⁶⁹ “Social Service Activities of the Department of Health” *Porto Rico Health Review: Official Bulletin of the Department of Health*, Vol 1, San Juan: PR, October 1925, No 4. 25.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid

family to help take care of the children and other extended family members were found in Puerto Rico. In the end, “an aunt offered her home to the oldest boy, the second child’s godmother took her and the smallest boy went to live with his godfather.”¹⁷¹ After all the children were placed in new homes the grandmother “was given a home in the Asylum for the Aged,” and social workers reported on the case as a great success. This case hints at new patterns of intervention and institutionalization that were becoming increasingly popular because of social work interventions. Family cases that were common, like grandmothers taking care of young children, were becoming the subjects of regulation by caseworkers that advocated for institutionalized care. Here the result was profound, as a family’s life was drastically altered when they were separated by social workers’ interventions. This case reveals how cases that were originally brought for medical reasons were often taken on by social workers from the agency. It also illustrates how social workers continued to use connections they had with United States agencies to contact migrants in the mainland for assistance with cases in Puerto Rico. This case hints at how the influence of social welfare officials continued to broaden during the 1920s.

By 1927, agents of the Department of Health went as far as saying, “We have introduced the *visiting nurse* and *social worker* as important factors in the social development of the community an have impressed the public with the importance of their work and the desirability of extending their fields of activity.”¹⁷² The role of these professional women in Puerto Rican society was widespread and continued to grow when

¹⁷¹ Ibid

¹⁷² J. Rodriguez Pastor, “Our Bureau of Social Welfare” *Porto Rico Review of Public Health and Tropical Medicine: Official Bulletin of the Department of Heath and the School of Tropical Medicine*, Vol 3, September 1927 no 3, 112.

the agency arranged for new groups of women to be sent to the United States to receive professional training. These women were specifically sent with the idea that when they returned they would be able to rework some of the other institutions on the island, including local orphanages and prisons, a school for the blind, and sanatorium for patients with tuberculosis. It took a while for them to receive their professional degrees and return to the island, leaving to a gap between when the government invested in the field and the beginning of most programs. The increasing number of professional social workers eventually led to the professionalization of the field in 1929, when the “Porto Rico Association of Trained Social Workers” was founded. The organization was one of the first professional organizations of its kind, and reflected the important role that participation in social work had come to play in Puerto Rican society.

During this period Puerto Rican reformers also used these new and increasingly popular ideas about the need for child welfare provisions to make larger arguments for Puerto Rican rights to the social benefits of citizenship provided in federal legislation. They worked to stretch the meanings of citizenship in imperial context, particularly in debates over the extension of policies like the Sheppard Towner Act. The island’s colonial government imagined the programs they created as preliminary, or placeholder, programs that later could be used to distribute federal aid if it was eventually granted. This history reveals how social welfare became an important site for fleshing out and testing the boundaries of Puerto Rican citizenship and its benefits and rights. In 1924 when Horace Towner (who had proposed the original Sheppard-Towner Bill) was Governor of Puerto Rico, he made a plea to congress, flanked by members of all three main political parties in Puerto Rico, for the extension of the Sheppard- Towner

Maternity and Infancy Act that had been approved in the mainland in 1921.¹⁷³ The Puerto Rican politicians who attended the hearing used the Children's Bureau study and data as evidence that the program should apply to Puerto Rico. Antonio R. Barcelo, Santiago Iglesias, Miguel Guerra Mondragon, and JoséTous Soto testified in support of the extension of the bill. Santiago Iglesias, who was a member of the Senate of Porto Rico and leader of the Socialist Party called attention to the committees possession of the report and called it a "profound and deep study of the conditions of maternity and the children in Puerto Rico" that "gives everything that you need to know, accurately... and showing what is the true condition of children in Puerto Rico."¹⁷⁴

In his request Towner stressed the permanence of Puerto Rico's union with the United States. He also argued that all of the main political factions on the island supported the extension of this legislation and that it symbolized the lack of support for independence on the island.

In 1917 we made these people American citizens. They are ours and will remain ours and we will be responsible for them as American citizens as long as the nation exists. There is no idea of independence extant in the island of Porto Rico; there is no political party that advocates it. We have the representatives here in this commission, the leaders of all three parties, and the things that they are asking for were passed unanimously by the legislature, including the application of this law. There is no difference in sentiment or in feeling regarding these matters among the people of Porto Rico; therefore it seems to me that we are under obligation to do what we can to help them.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ "Public Protection of Maternity and Infancy- Porto Rico." Hearings Before the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, House of Representatives, Sixty-Eighth Congress, First Session on H.R.6142. February, 19, 1924. Washington, Government Printing Office.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

Towner continued to mobilize an idea of Puerto Ricans as citizens, stating, “We are saying to you: ‘Here is large body of American citizens that need this help, need it perhaps more than any body of American citizens.’”¹⁷⁶ According to Towner, Puerto Rico had not been included in the original draft of the bill because the writers had feared their inclusion would slow down approval of the controversial law. Instead, they had waited until later to ask Congress for extensions, according to the needs and “merits” of these possessions. Hawaii had recently made a successful case for the extension of the law to its islands and the Puerto Rican case was made shortly afterwards.

While the reformers that ended up on the floor of the Congress were a group of male political figures, much of the labor that had led up to the proposal for the extension of the bill was built through the political activism of women from Puerto Rico and the United States. These female social reformers had worked to lay the groundwork for just such a claim in Congress. They had created the programs and institutions that made such claims possible. But the stories of these women were largely lost in the historical accounts that were produced about this moment. Lassalle’s own experience reveals an interesting twist that illustrates the way that female reformers were included but also excluded from historical scholarship. In 1925, her boss Paul G. Miller published a history of Puerto Rico that she translated into Spanish, which was used widely in the education system.¹⁷⁷ The book contains a section with a vivid recounting of the active role of women in modernization projects that stands in glaring contrast to the near total omission

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ In the introduction to Paul Miller’s history of Puerto Rico he notes that Beatriz Lassalle was instrumental in bringing her experience as a teacher to developing an approachable text. He noted that she had read every chapter giving pedagogical suggestions and making corrections. Paul G. Miller, *Historia de Puerto Rico* (Chicago: Rand, McNally y Compañía, 1922), 2.

of the history of women in the rest of the book. This passionate section was likely deeply influenced, if not partially written by, Lassalle herself.¹⁷⁸ The section does not go as far as saying directly that women should be given suffrage and more rights, but it intimate as much. As a curricular tool, with questions pertaining to suffrage at the end, it shows how far Lassalle had pushed her vision of women's rights and their role in state organizations. Lassalle's work on both the Children's Bureau study and Miller's history of Puerto Rico hints at the role of Puerto Rican women in the development of social science scholarship.

In the end, the Social Services program that Lassalle helped develop provided the foundation for future social welfare provisions in Puerto Rico. The development of these new programs would also be particularly important because of the deepening economic crisis that confronted the Puerto Rican people as years of colonial leadership had left many working-class people without steady employment or access to land. The worsening economic situation compounded with a massive hurricane in 1928 and the coming of the Great Depression resulted in a worsening of conditions for the island's residents. However, it also led to increased political mobilization and activism towards social change. This mobilization of the people as well as critiques of the colonial leadership, from both within and outside state institutions, paved the way for significant social reforms and changes in the 1930s. Within the field of social work there also emerged a liberal critique of the colonial project shared by Puerto Rican social workers as well as the elite United States reformers with whom they collaborated in building state

¹⁷⁸ María de los Angeles Castro Arroyo has suggested that Lassalle was the ghostwriter of the book. She states, "Rumores orales no conifrmados adjudican la autoria fantasma de este libro a Beatriz Lassalle." María de los Angeles Castro Arroyo "Política y nacion cultural: Puerto Rico 1898-1938" in Consuelo Naranjo, María Dolores Luque de Sánchez, and Miguel Angel Puig-Samper *Los lazos de la cultura: el Centro de Estudios Históricos de Madrid y la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1916-1939* (Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Históricas de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, 2002), 7.

institutions. Compounded with a rise in the professionalization of women and new openings for women's participation in government organizations, this shifting political climate resulted in new negotiations and collaborations within the field of social work. Women who were recruited specifically to be agents domesticated empire through interventions into the lives and work of Puerto Rican families, and they brought their own perspectives to the civilizing and modernizing projects they developed. Social workers entered new roles creating state institutions and forging relationships with the communities with whom they worked, creating divisions and solidarities in the 1920s that would have lasting impacts on Puerto Rican state formation and the relationship between state and society.

Building upon this chapter, the next will explore how the vision of Puerto Rican social worker begun during the 1920s became a part of the extension of United States New Deal social policy to the island in the 1930s. This chapter will show how the Department of Education, with the assistance of Lassalle, recruited a group of women in a new social work training program focused on community development that placed them as "school social workers" in rural areas. These social workers were trained and mentored by the small cohort of social workers trained in the United States in the 20s. This new program was almost immediately taken over by New Deal reformers in Puerto Rico who used it as a means to distribute relief and work towards rehabilitation in the wake of the depression. This new group of social workers were groomed to work in administrative positions in an the expanding welfare state, and they were the architects of rural social service programs that expanded into every town on the island. They also built upon their

predecessors' work to secure the extension of federal social welfare legislation to Puerto Rico by fighting for the extension of social policies to the colonial territories.

CHAPTER TWO

Building *Bienestar Público*: Puerto Rican Social Workers in the New Deal Era

On June 1, 1936, the New York Times ran an article with the headlines “Women Ask Relief for Puerto Ricans” that proclaimed, “Extension of Social Security Act to Island Urged by Five Delegates to Convention.”¹⁷⁹ The delegates were Puerto Rican women who had traveled to the National Conference of Social Workers in Atlantic City to petition the organization for support in their struggle to get the New Deal social policy, created one year before, to include Puerto Rico. The Social Security Act of 1935 brought a sweeping set of new reforms that established a new federal system of social rights. The welfare system that would provide the infrastructure to support these social rights included social insurance programs and public assistance programs for the poor, elderly and disabled. The New York Times’ reporter claimed that “Almost lost in the millions of words uttered here last week at the National Conference on Social Work in behalf of the ‘forgotten man’ were the Spanish accents of five young women, arguing the cause of a whole island of forgotten people.”

¹⁷⁹ “Women Ask Relief for Puerto Ricans: Extension of Social Security Act...” *The New York Times*, June 1, 1936, 19.

María Pintado, Celestina Zalduondo, Mercedes Velez, Carmen Alvarado, and Geraldine Froscher were all staff members of the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration (PRERA), a branch of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration.¹⁸⁰ These Puerto Rican social workers were in the midst of administering the extension of a New Deal agency that was drastically changing the relationship between state and society on the island through the distribution of work and direct relief in centers throughout Puerto Rico. The article provided a fast-paced account of Puerto Rico's situation in relation to the Social Security Act, stating that the U.S. government "owns" the island, and that "84 per cent of its approximately 1,800,000 population has applied to the government for relief," under PRERA.

The *New York Times* article noted that Puerto Rican social workers had come to the conference to ask for help in achieving "an extension of the social security program to their island and an amendment to the Organic Act under which Puerto Rico is governed which will permit the establishment of a Puerto Rican Department of Public Welfare."¹⁸¹ They argued that if Puerto Ricans were given support and funding through inclusion in these social policies, that the island's dependency could be averted in the present and future. The delegation sought to influence U.S. politics and challenge the island's exclusion from the social citizenship rights and benefits emerging during the New Deal. They navigated alternative channels of political organization in the face of colonial restrictions on their U.S. citizenship, because Puerto Ricans had no representation in

¹⁸⁰ For more on the history of the New Deal in Puerto Rico see: Manuel R. Rodríguez, *A New Deal for the Tropics: Puerto Rico During the Depression Era, 1932-1935* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010).

¹⁸¹ "Women Ask Relief," 9.

Congress, or formal say in how they were governed.¹⁸² In order to advocate for these changes in social policy they drew upon professional networks they had created in Puerto Rico and the United States as a part of the professionalization of social work. These professional networks were rooted in the women's ties with United States schools of social work where they had studied which had created a colonial and transnational group of trained social workers. The article listed the women's academic credential stating that "all have studied at schools of social work in this country," and among them they had degrees from the School of Social Work in Philadelphia, the New York School of Social Work, and the University of Chicago's Graduate School of Social Service, Smith College, as well as the University of Puerto Rico

By advocating for Puerto Rico's inclusion in the Social Security Act these social workers addressed a few major questions about the reach of social welfare into the U.S. colonial territories as well as about what the rights and benefits of territorial Puerto Rican citizenship would be as the welfare state was created.¹⁸³ The creation of new social rights in the United States under the Social Security Act of 1935 meant that a reevaluation of the rights and benefits of Puerto Rican citizenship was also possible because even through Puerto Rican people were not entitled to political citizenship they might be covered under the social rights of this new legislation. The passing of the Social Security Act represented a change in citizenship in the United States that has been discussed by

¹⁸² For more on the restrictions of constitutional restrictions of Puerto Rican citizenship see: Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall. *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). César J Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹⁸³ There has been little written about the history of social citizenship in Puerto Rico, a notable exception is the scholarship of sociologist Marietta Morrissey. See: Marietta Morrissey, "The Making of a Colonial Welfare State US Social Insurance and Public Assistance in Puerto Rico." *Latin American Perspectives* 33.1 (2006): 23-41.

feminist scholars as particularly constructing differential forms of rights that were marked by racial and gender divisions because of the ways that the titles of the Act allocated differential rights for different groups and also allowed states to administer much of the federal funding, resulting in federalist policies that discriminated against particular groups, particularly African Americans.

From the moment that the Social Security Act of 1935 was debated in the United States Congress the Puerto Rican non-voting member of the United States Congress, the Resident Commissioner had petitioned the Congress that the island should be covered. However, in the first passage of the Act Puerto Rico was not covered by the bill. Puerto Ricans responded by organizing for the extension of these policies to the island, arguing that at United States citizens Puerto Ricans were entitled to welfare benefits established by the Social Security Act. When the Puerto Rican social workers traveled to lobby United States social workers and the United States Congress for the extension of the Act in 1936 they were raising questions about Puerto Rico's status and what the meaning of Puerto Rican citizenship would be as the welfare state emerged. They asked: Did the new vision of social citizenship drafted into the Social Security Act of 1935 apply to citizens in an unincorporated territory? Would the Act eventually cover Puerto Rico? And if Puerto Rican citizens were entitled to these new U.S. social welfare provisions, then in what form, and under what conditions?

In order to explore these questions this chapter investigates the history of the development of social work in 1930s Puerto Rico as a space where Puerto Rican women advocated on behalf of the expansion of colonial social citizenship. In this chapter I draw on the research and writing of subsequent generations of social workers who documented

their predecessors lives, to trace the lives of an earlier generation of women and their activism within social welfare agencies.¹⁸⁴ I build on scholarship that has highlighted how during the 1930s, social workers were involved in developing the Puerto Rican colonial state at the same time as they became leaders in divergent social and political movements as activists, including nationalist and colonial project of modernization and development on the island. I trace the training of social workers in programs developed by the Puerto Rican government in the 1930s, their recruitment into New Deal agencies, and participation in the creation of new colonial state institutions under the populist reforms spearheaded the Popular Democratic Party after 1938. However, my research also suggests that that these investigations have not fully captured the ways that the increasingly transnational lives of social workers shaped their work developing social welfare programs.

This chapter documents how as social workers traveled to the U.S. to study and work in U.S. social welfare agencies, they were called upon to work with Puerto Rican migrant clients and to link together social welfare programs on the island with those and the United States. Through this labor social workers emerged as experts on migration and its consequences. Their transnational work and experiences informed the ways they developed New Deal and populist social welfare projects on the island.

The chapter traces four moments where social workers played central roles in the development of social welfare policies in Puerto Rico and as advocates for the expansion

¹⁸⁴ The main study on the history of Puerto Rican social work I draw on here is by Nilsa Burgos Ortiz, who also gave me access to some tape recordings of the oral histories that were taken by oral histories for this project. This included interviews that were taken by social work students that participated in the project. These documents show the central role that social workers have played in recording their own professional history, and capturing the voices of generations of older social workers. Nilsa Burgos Ortiz, *Pioneras de la profesión de trabajo social en Puerto Rico* (Hato Rey, P.R.: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 1997).

of Puerto Ricans social citizenship rights. First, in the expansion of the role of the state in the lives of Puerto Rican citizens through their work in modernization and development programs during the early 1930s. Second, as they became administrators of New Deal programs like PRERA, women entered new professional leadership roles. I show how in both of these moments, social workers were explicitly meant to influence gender politics and shape labor and class dynamics through interventions in the intimate and working lives of rural communities. Third, I explore social workers' journey's to the U.S., their work with migrant communities, and their development of welfare bureaucracies and networks that connected Puerto Rico to the U.S. In the final section, I show how changes in the island's political relationship to the U.S. with the formation of a new populist party, as well as the growing political clout of the U.S. migrant community precipitated a new conversation around the Social Security Act. By 1939, a set of U.S. congressional hearings on the topic, in which social workers continued their struggle for these policies and emerged partially victorious, resulted in the first two titles of the Social Security Act being extended. Moreover, this victory laid the foundation for the 1943 change in the island's Organic Act that allowed for the creation of a public welfare department, *Bienestar Público*. This program was imagined by many social worker and U.S. officials as a placeholder, whose infrastructure would eventually allow the full extension of the Social Security Act. While this promise proved contentious and elusive, social workers labor and coalitions for social reform moved forward and in new directions, with increasing power and authority after 1943.

Social Workers in the *Segundas Unidades Rurales*

*“Eramos Veintiocho. Apenas mozeulas.
Mariposas timidas con alas de pajarito.
Ibamos armadas de nobles ideales....
Servicios sociales con alma amasados”*

- Carmen Rivera de Alvarado ¹⁸⁵

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the development of new educational programs provided the infrastructure for expanding the field of social work within the public education system. The social workers that worked for these programs developed and professionalized social work before the New Deal arrived on the island, and in the mid-1930s when these programs were extended they were recruited to manage these agencies. In 1930, twenty-eight young women that had recently graduated from the University of Puerto Rico's Normal School and applied for a new training program in social work developed by the Department of Education. The cohort were chosen by the Department of Education to be placed in a new type of rural educational initiative called the *Segundas Unidades Rurales*, or the Second Unit Rural Schools.¹⁸⁶ These schools were part of a larger state project begun in the late 1920 that sought to modernize Puerto Rico through intervention in the lives of the rural poor. The state programs created in this

¹⁸⁵ Carmen Rivera de Alvarado wrote about her experiences as a social worker in essays and lectures that were published posthumously. The essay where this quote from a poem she wrote was included was originally completed in 1971. Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, "Orígenes de la profesión de trabajo social en Puerto Rico," *Lucha y visión de Puerto Rico libre* (Río Piedras, P.R.: T. Rivera de Ríos, 1986), 113. For more on the life and work of Carmen Rivera de Alvarado also see: Raquel M. de Seda Rodríguez, "Legado de Carmen Rivera de Alvarado a la profesión de trabajo social en Puerto Rico," *Voces desde el Trabajo Social: Colegio de Profesionales de Trabajo Social* 1 (2012).

¹⁸⁶ The development of the Second Unit Schools was documented in: Francisco Vizcarrondo, *Education in Porto Rico. The Second-Unit Rural Schools of Porto Rico, Pre-Vocational Schools for Pupils of Intermediate Grades* (San Juan, P.R.: Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1930). Antonio Rodríguez Jr, *The Second Unit Schools and the Rural School Problem of Puerto Rico* (Ed.D. diss., Indiana University, 1943).



Figure II.1. "Social workers from the *Segundas Unidades Rurales* at a public health clinic in Caguas, 1931." From: Rivera de Alvarado, *Lucha y Vision de Puerto Rico Libre*. (Rio Piedras, PR: T. Rivera de Rios, 1986).

period responded to the economic crisis on the island after over thirty years of U.S.

colonial rule and corporate development.¹⁸⁷ The reformers that worked in these programs

believed that the Puerto Rican rural population had not seen the benefits of the economic

¹⁸⁷ There were widespread economic problems on the island that were addressed by reformers during this period and have been documented in histories of Puerto Rico. Historian Lillian Guerra has documented limitations and difficulties that occurred as a part of the Americanization project which failed poor Puerto Ricans who were struggling with the impacts of the Great Depression and United States capitalist development in Puerto Rico. Lillian Guerra, *Popular Expression and National Identity in Puerto Rico The Struggle for Self, Community, and Nation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998). Widespread landlessness, while a problem before U.S. intervention, became a greater issue when people that had informal access to land were no longer able to move because property came under U.S. ownership. See: César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Rosa E. Carrasquillo, *Our Landless Patria: Marginal Citizenship and Race in Caguas, Puerto Rico, 1880-1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

development of the island under colonialism. These reformers acknowledge that much of the capitalist development on the island had been conducted by U.S. sugar trusts with absentee owners whose profits had not “trickled down” to provide a better standard of living on the island. This mode of development had also resulted in the restriction of rural land usage for subsistence farming and led to an increase in an already growing migration to urban areas that had been a target of social reform, and the work of social workers, since the 1920s. Many Puerto Rican educational reformers also believed rural modernization projects would slow migration from rural areas and promote the development of the island. The social workers were expected to travel to rural areas and begin conducting casework and initiating community development projects in the communities surrounding the schools. While the projects were meant to promote the agenda of the colonial government they often fostered other activism and organization as socialist and nationalist women became important members of the ranks of social workers.

Foremost among the concerns of the Department of Education administrators was the goal of “modernizing” and developing the island through interventions in the lives and laborers of working class and poor communities in rural areas. These programs targeted the rural peasant, or “jibaro,” that was described in state discourses as “backwards,” “primitive,” and in need of the guiding hand of the more educated and privileged classes.¹⁸⁸ While earlier interventions by colonial officials had mustered similar concepts, the Puerto Rican elite of this period reworked discourses, casting

¹⁸⁸ The “jibaro” was also imagined over time in different ways, and eventually would come to be a symbol of Puerto Rican whiteness and maleness. This is something discussed in the work of: Lillian Guerra, *Popular Expression and National Identity in Puerto Rico The Struggle for Self, Community, and Nation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

themselves as able to carry out social and economic transformations, where U.S. officials had failed. Influenced by emerging ideas in the social sciences, these reformers believed that social and cultural interventions, based on recommendations derived from social scientific evaluation, could transform and modernize Puerto Rico. They argued that U.S. colonial agents failure to be culturally sensitive, and their lack of proper knowledge about the Puerto Rican social context, had undermined the development of the island. Francisco Vizcarrondo, a member of the Department of Education with experience overseeing the creation of the Juvenile Red Cross, was chosen by the agency as one of the architects of the Second Unit Schools.¹⁸⁹ The Department of Education meant for the schools to provide secondary education in rural areas that represented a new turn towards vocational education with an emphasis on community development. The goal of these Department of Education programs was to provide “practical” education, shaping new workers and citizens, rather than centering the curriculum on academic training.¹⁹⁰

Social Work Training

Among the women chosen for the project were two young women that went on to become important leaders in the socialist and independence movements in Puerto Rico,

¹⁸⁹ Francisco Vizcarrondo wrote extensively the transformation of the educational program in Puerto Rico and also presented information about this program in forums outside of the island. See for example: Francisco Vizcarrondo, *The School System of Porto Rico* (San Juan, P.R.: Bureau of Supplies, Printing and Transportation, 1925). Francisco Vizcarrondo, *Education in Porto Rico; The Fourth of a Series of Reports on the Educational Movement of Porto Rico* (San Juan, P.R.: Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1929).

¹⁹⁰ For more on the history of education in Puerto Rico under United States rule see: Aida Negrón de Montilla, *Americanization in Puerto Rico and the Public-School System, 1900-1930* (Rio Piedras, PR: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1975).

Carmen Rivera de Alvarado and Blanca Canales. Each of these women later recollected that their experiences in the development of these innovative colonial social programs helped them develop forms of community organizing that informed their later organizing and activism on behalf of Puerto Rican independence. Like many of the other social workers of the period, these women's lives had been shaped by the surge in political activism in Puerto Rico during the 1910s and 1920s, particularly among working-class laborers and the development of a robust socialist party. Carmen Rivera de Alvarado came from a rural area and was raised in a socialist household.¹⁹¹ Her father was a socialist and a well-known poet who held meetings in the home. Rivera later reflected that her experience witnessing the central role of women in socialist and anarchist organizing during the period had spurred her to consider how pursue a life as a political activist. Blanca Canales, also a recent graduate of UPR, from the, belonged to well-known family of nationalists that supported the independence of Puerto Rico.¹⁹² Canales had also excelled during her bachelors degree program in liberal arts and was accepted into the social work program shortly afterwards, anticipating that she would be able to return to her hometown to work in the community.

After completing her degree at the University of Puerto Rico with honors Carmen Rivera de Alvarado decided to apply for the newly created social work program because

¹⁹¹ Carmen Rivera de Alvarado later wrote about the history and development of Puerto Rican women's work within nationalist organizations. Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, "Contribucion de la mujer al desarrollo de la nacionalidad Puertorriquena," *Lucha y vision de Puerto Rico libre*. This article was originally published in the pro-independence newspaper *Claridad* on September 20, 1970.

¹⁹² Blanca Canales wrote an autobiography that documents her life and activism in the nationalist movement. Canales was one of the leaders of the "Jayuya Uprising" in 1950 in Puerto Rico, when a group of nationalist took over the town of Jayuya and declared it independent from the United States for three days. Afterwards Canales was arrested and served seventeen years in prison before being released. She continued her work as an activist in the nationalist party until her death in 1996. Blanca Canales, *La constitución es la revolución* (San Juan, P.R.: Comité de Estudios, Congreso Nacional Hostosiano, 1997).

she saw it as an opportunity to help support her family during the Depression as well as to participate in the social transformations spearheaded within the Department of Education.¹⁹³ According to Rivera the interview process was difficult and she wasn't initially accepted into the program because she didn't have the right family connections. However, after she protested her rejection she and a number of other women that were not from the most elite families, and including some others from socialist households, were accepted into the program. Reflecting upon their experiences later the social workers noted the energy and enthusiasm that the young women felt embarking on these projects, it was a heady time when the women were taught by the Department of Education that they could have a transformative impact on the rural communities with whom they were going to be working. The project of social work during the early years of the *Segundas Unidades Rurales* served as an umbrella under which women with varying political orientations were unified in a the goal of reforming and transforming Puerto Rico through state interventions. This vision included that of nationalist women who would later diverge in certain ways from the group as they joined the independence movement.

Before the social workers departed for their new positions the women took summer courses at UPR in social work, including in casework methods and public health. After the first trial year, the Department of Education decided to create a training program for social workers that would be placed in the network of schools they devised. To direct the program they chose Dorothy Bourne, a social worker fro the U.S., who

¹⁹³ Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, *Lucha y Vision*.



Figure II.2. Dorothy Bourne and Carmen Alvarado. Framed photograph in the Department of Social Work at the University of Puerto Rico, 2012.

worked alongside a group of experienced Puerto Rican social workers that included Beatriz Lassalle one of the founders of social work in Puerto Rico and the subject of chapter one of the dissertation.¹⁹⁴ Bourne had extensive experience in the United States before moving to Puerto Rico with her husband, James, who worked directing a cannery. In the U.S., they had also run a farm in Hyde Park, New York, and been close friends of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt.¹⁹⁵ Dorothy Bourne was particularly interested in the

¹⁹⁴ Bourne notes the social work participants that helped develop the training program in: Dorothy Dulles Bourne, *Professional Training for Social Work in Puerto Rico* (San Juan, P.R.: University of Puerto Rico, 1935).

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Mathew discusses the Bourne's arrival to Puerto Rico in: Thomas G. Mathews, *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960).

emerging, and not mainstream, types of social work, like community organizing and rural social work.¹⁹⁶ In Puerto Rico, she chose as her Assistant Director another social worker from the U.S., Charlotte Leeper, who had experience working in Alabama.¹⁹⁷ The Department of Education also included Puerto Rican social workers trained in the 1920s as part of the organizational team, many of whom many already had experience running government programs. Like Lassalle, the majority of these social workers had experience living and working in social welfare agencies in the United States. For example, Olimpia T. de Zeno had trained in the settlement house movement in New York and returned to Puerto Rico to work at the intersection of social work and public health work, becoming a leader in the development of maternal and infant health programs.

The main goal of the *Segundas Unidades Rurales* was to rebuild rural inhabitants into workers who could establish small farms by providing vocational education training to students. Within the schools the social workers performed a variety of different roles and tasks and served as intermediaries between the school and the rural communities that surrounded them. One of the innovations of the program was the inclusion of a social worker as a “visiting teacher” in the schools, an idea based on rural education models in

¹⁹⁶ Dorothy Bourne received a certificate in rural social work from Cornell University after working as a social worker for a number of years. The Bourne’s were likely in conversation about the possibility of their involvement in the administration of the island if FDR won the upcoming presidential election, and in a short time James Bourne was chosen to oversee the creation of New Deal agencies on the island. Thomas G. Mathews, *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal*.

¹⁹⁷ Charlotte Leeper later married the writer Earl Parker Hanson, who worked on a number of projects for the Puerto Rican government during the subsequent modernization programs. He was a part of the “planning” group that also worked to create some labor programs, including a needlework program. He wrote about the history of Puerto Rico and his experiences in a number of publications, including: Earl Parker Hanson. *Transformation: The Story of Modern Puerto Rico* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955). Earl Parker Hanson, *Puerto Rico, Land of Wonders* (New York: Knopf, 1960).

the U.S. and Europe, that was tried out in the first five schools created in 1928.¹⁹⁸

Vizcarrondo noted that the social workers were to play a central role in the development of the schools as community centers. "A special teacher of social work is employed in each second unit. Her principle duty is to visit the families, study their needs and help them in the solution of their social, economic and sanitary problems."¹⁹⁹ These social workers were imagined from the start as being important members of school's faculty and were also given a couple courses to teach while the conducted social work with the rest of their time. However, after the first year their role was changed and they were no longer given teaching responsibilities. Instead, their work focused on a combination of more traditional forms of social work like casework with individual students and their families. Social workers encouraged enrollment and attendance in the schools, serving a function similar to a "truant officer," and meeting with parents about their children in home visits.²⁰⁰ Often social workers visits were made when the child was working and the social workers were charged with enforcing emerging labor laws.

Social Workers in the Rural Schools

The majority of social workers in the *Segundas Unidades Rurales*, like Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, worked specifically in modernization programs aimed at guiding the rural people towards a more organized form of society. One of the key components of

¹⁹⁸ Anne Meis Knupfer, "The Arm of the School Which Extends into the Home: The Visiting Teacher Movement, 1906 to 1940." *The Teachers College Record* 100, no. 3 (1999): 627-655.

¹⁹⁹ Vizcarrondo, *The Second Unit Rural Schools*, 13.

²⁰⁰ Manuel Cabranes refers to it this way and comments on links between this social work program and the visiting teacher program in the US. Cabranes, *Social Work in the Second Unit Schools*.

this vision was the continued espousal of a gendered division of society and labor promoted by the state through the development of vocational education. The Department of Education designed vocational training along two tracks that reflected the gendered vision of labor espoused by the state, providing agricultural training to boys and home economics instruction to girls. The discourse of modernity within the foundation of these programs rested on upholding the patriarchal nuclear family, through a generalized idea of the male breadwinner working as a farmer that supported his partner, the housewife. The social workers were specifically seen as modeling a certain state sponsored ideal of both femininity and domesticity.²⁰¹ One of the ways they promoted these ideas was by organizing clubs and groups that involved parents, like parents and teachers organizations that worked to bring parents into school activities. This was crucial because the schools performed non-traditional function including housing a model home and garden that produced goods used by the community.²⁰²

One of the other aspects of gendered policy in the *Segundas Unidades Rurales*, that Carmen Rivera de Alvarado became particularly involved in, was an engagement with reproductive politics on the island. The social workers connected the populations in the rural schools to an expanding web of public health clinics with growing influence in rural areas. Social workers arranged for doctors, nurses, and dentists to make visits to the schools in order to provide some medical care on site. One of the main components of this program was addressing women's reproductive health specifically, providing

²⁰¹ Vizcarrondo, *The Second Unit Rural Schools*.

²⁰² The model home and garden was one of the central components of this program, which was similar to the development of these practices in the industrial school movement. Vizcarrondo, *The Second Unit Rural Schools*.

referrals for women near the schools to meet with doctors who were running maternal health programs. Some of these programs provided birth control. In helping women get access to birth control social workers entered new roles, specifically as intermediaries between the maternal health program and rural communities. The creation of these programs faced a lot of political opposition, and through their participation in these programs some of the social workers became particularly ardent advocates of providing birth control access to rural women, which would shape their involvement in future discussions. Rural women's sexuality increasingly became the target of reformers as they discussed and debated an emerging consensus about the problem of "overpopulation" on the island. Through their work promoting birth control social workers became important advocates of what Laura Briggs has called a Puerto Rican form of "progressive eugenics" which sought to restrict population growth.²⁰³

Some of the social workers were specifically assigned to develop programs that linked the work of the *Segundas Unidades Rurales* to ongoing state led public health programs under the leadership of the insular Department of Sanitation and Health. One of the first social workers chosen to work on such a project was Blanca Canales, who despite expecting a placement in a rural school in her hometown of Jayuya, was selected to work with a group of health researchers from the School of Tropical Medicine that were conducting an investigation.²⁰⁴ The project she joined was part of ongoing research on hookworm initiated by the military doctor Bailey K. Ashford in 1898 and funded by

²⁰³ Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

²⁰⁴ Nilsa Burgos Ortiz, *Pioneras de la profesion*.

the Rockefeller Foundation.²⁰⁵ Canales worked on the project as a field worker and research assistant. She was hired to develop links to the community and encourage individuals to participate and follow through with the research program. In particular, she oversaw the creation of new latrines and waste disposal methods that were supposed to control the spread of hookworm.²⁰⁶ While doing her field work Canales lived on the farm of an American woman named Clara Livingston, and traveled into the communities where she worked. As a research assistant she also collected surveys in the community, and produced data the U.S. social scientists used to write their study. The research resulted in a publication by the authors, which briefly mentions her participation.²⁰⁷ Through their roles on such project the social workers became a part of a growing number of women collecting data for health and social science research on the island.

Social Workers as Researchers and Reformers

At the same time that social workers continued their work in the *Segundas Unidades Rurales* they returned to the University of Puerto Rico each summer to get more training in social work and the collection of case file data. Their jobs counted as fieldwork placements and were accepted as credit towards fulfillment of the requirements for their certificates in social work. The Puerto Rican program was imagined by the

²⁰⁵ José Amador, “*Redeeming the Tropics: Public Health and National Identity in Cuba, Puerto Rico and Brazil, 1890-1940*” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008). Bailey K. Ashford, *A Soldier in Science: The Autobiography of Bailey K. Ashford* (New York: W. Morrow and Company, 1934).

²⁰⁶ Blanca Canales oral history cited in: Nilsa Burgos Ortiz, *Pioneras de la profesion*.

²⁰⁷ George Bachman, Rodriguez Molina et all (1937). *Estudio sobre el control del parasitismo intestinal en Puerto Rico durante un periodo de cinco anos y medio*. Puerto Rico Journal of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, 12 (4), 389-404.

Department of Education leadership from the beginning as being different from that taught in U.S. programs. The courses were meant to address the particular needs of Puerto Rico. Dorothy Bourne wrote about this in a published curriculum for the course of study and in article on social work and social welfare in Puerto Rico.²⁰⁸ The course work developed responded to the needs identified by social workers in the field and the curriculum changed significantly over the first couple years. The course awarded a certificate, not an MA degree, which was the U.S. standard, which left social workers that wanted to receive a terminal degree with only one option, traveling to schools in the U.S. Social workers connected to the UPR campus also had other impacts on their training because the school was at the center of state transformation and the emergence of new discourses about the role of social science knowledge. Many of the teachers and experts that participated in the training program were involved in the expanding field of public health, this included officials working for the School of Tropical Medicine, as well as sociologists, and others.²⁰⁹ The faculty discussed and debated what types of course should be included in the program, Dorothy Bourne noted that in the beginning there was a more expansive list of social science courses included that was later restricted to those directly related to social work. This may have reflected a larger gendered division of labor between social work and other social science fields, whereby social work was being

²⁰⁸ Bourne published the curriculum for the school and also later discussed the outcome in her follow up study on social change in Puerto Rico published with her husband thirty years later. See: Dorothy Bourne, *Social Work Training in Puerto Rico*. Bourne, Dorothy Dulles, and James Russell Bourne, *Thirty Years of Change in Puerto Rico: A Case Study of Ten Selected Rural Areas* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1966).

²⁰⁹ Bourne, *Social Work Training in Puerto Rico*.

framed by the Department of Education as different from these other fields, even though they had similar origins.²¹⁰

Scholars and government agencies used the data that social workers collected about their clients in numerous texts and reports written about rural communities during the period. For instance, the social work experiment in the *Segundas Unidades Rurales* also became the site of a much larger social science research project, which drew upon the case file information collected by social workers. The project was published as a study in “Social and Economic Conditions” by Dorothy Bourne and Luz Ramos.²¹¹

Ramos was one of the directors of the Home Economics program at UPR who collaborated with Bourne to produce the study, which was published as a guidebook and teachers manual for rural teachers. In doing this work they worked hand in hand with home economists that were also placed in the rural schools to create vocational educational programs for women.²¹² This material was collected at first to help in the schools, and was not originally created for an outside audience. However, these social science projects did produce knowledge about Puerto Ricans that was later cited by the state as justification for the work of organizations and agencies. The Bourne and Ramos

²¹⁰ The gendered division between social work and sociology (and other fields of social science) has been written about in literature on the history of social work in the United States. See for example: Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

²¹¹ The study that Bourne and Ramos did in the 1930s was later the basis for a follow up study that was done thirty years and later and which resulted in another publication. It was written in a moment when there was widespread belief in the positive influence of the “planned” development of the island under the populist reforms of the Partido Popular Democrático. Dorothy Dulles Bourne and James Russell Bourne. *Thirty Years of Change in Puerto Rico; A Case Study of Ten Selected Rural Areas* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1966).

²¹² Historian José Flores Ramos discusses how the Puerto Rican home became the subject of discourses in home economic. See: José Enrique Flores Ramos, *Mujer, familia y prostitución: La construcción del género bajo la hegemonía del Partido Popular Democrático, 1940-1968*. Thesis (Ph. D.)--Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2002.

study explored the living conditions of rural workers and attempted to measure and document how modernization and development could affect change in their lives. The language used reflects the prejudices of its authors and rural areas are referred to as “primitive” and “backwards” and in need of the modernizing and transformative intervention of state agents and experts.

During the same period that the social workers at the *Segundas Unidades Rurales* continued to hone their skills in the field, many also became more involved in supporting the nationalist and independence cause on the island. The social work program began during the same year when a Nationalist Party Congress was held and supporters of independence rallied around the leader Pedro Albizu Campos. One of the main connections between the social workers and the independence party was Blanca Canales, who first saw the independence leader Albizu Campos speak during her first summer at the social work training program. The following summer when she returned to the University of Puerto Rico’s campus she went to a meeting at Albizu Campos’ house and discussed the independence cause with him and his wife, Laura Menses Campos.²¹³ After the meeting Canales began speaking with some of her other friends and fellow students in the social work program about the nationalist organizations of the period. She brought some of these students, like the young Isabel Rosado with her to some of the meetings at their house.²¹⁴ In this way, Blanca became a conduit of information about the nationalist

²¹³ Blanca Canales cousin was Nemesio Canales, a well-known nationalist and feminist that had proposed a bill that first approved suffrage for women in Puerto Rico. Before passing away as a young man Nemesio Canales had met and befriended Pedro Albizu Campos during his travels in the 1920s. When Blanca Canales met Albizu they spoke about her cousin. See: Interview with Blanca Canales in Nilsa Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras de la Profesion*.

²¹⁴ Isabel Rosado Morales wrote a biography about mentions her experiences and involvement in the nationalist organizing of Puerto Rican teachers and social workers. Rosado was also a young social worker that was active in nationalist organizing. She served eleven years in prison for her nationalist activities, she

cause between Albizu Campos and some of the other young social workers and students. The social workers connections to the UPR campus also had other long-term consequences for the social workers, as the campus became the site of political student organizing in favor of nationalism and independence.

In participating in the formation of social work during this period, the women that became social workers had laid claim to new roles and identities that were created by and served to create new divisions in society. They were the agents of the modernization program, and through their studies and work they targeted the poor as being in need of reform. Dorothy Bourne and the social workers wrote that the establishment of these field methods in Puerto Rico was a “creative” process, where new approaches to social work were developed that fit the particularities of the Puerto Rican context.²¹⁵ In creating these practices, social workers navigated the politics of the construction of social science knowledge in the field for the first time. This was work done by women who often worked in close collaboration with rural communities who influenced their process.²¹⁶ While they studied methods in school, the form this work took varied in the particular situations they faced. Social work interventions specifically targeted women, work, and reproduction.²¹⁷ For social workers, the formation of new types of practice (actually forms of praxis), integrated their politics with the day-to-day work that they did in the

was arrested shortly after the nationalist attack on U.S. congress in 1954 led by he friend and fellow nationalist Lolita Lebron. She is alive today and filmmaker Melissa Z. Montero Padilla is making a documentary about her life called “Isabel Rosado: Nacionalista.” Isabel Rosado Morales, *Mis testimonios* (Rio Piedras: Biblioteca Albizu Campos, 2007).

²¹⁵ Bourne, *Thirty Years of change*.

²¹⁶ The social workers interviewed by Nilsa Burgos Ortíz discuss this. See: Nilsa Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras de la Profesion*. ”

²¹⁷ Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*.

schools. Some of the more radical social workers like Blanca Canales later described this type of social work as “social work of the people.” The profession of social work in particular fostered radical ideas about the nation and community empowerment--that had long lasting intellectual and political results within Puerto Rican women’s organizing for political change-- that have not fully been explored. The first result of these new practices of social work was that it laid the foundation for the development of New Deal programs that came shortly after the creation of the *Segundas Unidades Rurales*. The field of social work was already underway when the social workers and their directors were charged with a major expansion of social services with the coming of the New Deal.

Working with Gender and Class during the New Deal

Shortly after the creation of the social work training program within the Second Units, an even larger transformation swept Puerto Rico when New Deal reforms were implemented by the United States and Puerto Rican governments. These changes began with the creation of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA) on August 19, 1933, when Franklin Roosevelt, chose his friend James Bourne, the husband of Dorothy Dulles Bourne, to direct the agency.²¹⁸ Throughout the island there was a consensus developing among socialists, nationalists and insular government agencies that there needed to be some way to restrict the unencumbered growth of U.S. sugar trusts.

²¹⁸ The Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA) published two annual reports outlining the work that it completed. This agency was a branch of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) created in May 1933. The goal of FERA was to reduce unemployment in the U.S. by creating job programs that included the work of the Civil Works Administration (CWA) that employed many of these workers. FERA programs ended in 1935 when the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Social Security Administration were created.

The result of unfettered capitalist development on the island was a displaced and impoverished population that continued to protest the poor conditions it faced. Puerto Rico was in crisis by the early 1930s and the Great Depression severely worsened these contradictions. In response, the United States government under Roosevelt decided to use the New Deal as a means to begin reigning in the sugar corporations by enforcing restrictions on the amount of land that could be owned by a single one individual or corporation. In addition, they sought to redistribute land and resources to Puerto Rican workers in order to begin supporting the creation of local agriculture. In addition to these programs the Puerto Rican government would also oversee the development of new social service and relief programs, like those underway in the United States, on the island. This provided a new opportunity for social workers to take on roles as employees in New Deal programs.

In the PRERA's first annual report James Bourne noted that the depression and two major hurricanes had left Puerto Rico "perhaps at the lowest point in its history," with a growing population and widespread poverty.²¹⁹ Despite these hardships he claimed that, "Puerto Rico has many assets, including a wonderful climate, an able and industrious people with a real desire to work and distinct aversion to charity and relief." He went on to argue that, "Given the opportunity Puerto Rico can become a self-sustaining and creditable part of the American nation." For Bourne, PRERA provided "the opportunity to prove this." The PRERA was therefore, not only meant to provide relief for the island, but also to transform it, and perhaps, even to be fully integrated into

²¹⁹ James R. Bourne, "Introduction to the Annual Report," *First Annual Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration from August 19, 1933, to August 31, 1934* (San Juan, P.R.: Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1935), 7.

the U.S. Historian Manuel Rodriguez has argued that the New Deal project in Puerto Rico centered not only on providing relief and rehabilitation like the US programs, but was also imagined by its creators as a development program meant to modernize Puerto Rico.

Social workers played an important role in these programs and in the expansion of the U.S. welfare state as their ranks grew and they led relief and labor programs. In this way it continued and intensified the work already way in the Second Unit Schools. Dorothy Bourne enlisted the social workers from the Second Unit's to staff PRERA's Social Service Division, where they entered into new administrative roles. Manuel Rodriguez notes that this modernization program transformed the relationship between the Puerto Rican people and the state through a new forms of governance managed by a Social Service Division, that, "represented a complex bureaucratic order with the purpose of examining, classifying, and designating the place of individuals within society."²²⁰ It was the first PRERA agency created, and Dorothy Bourne selected seasoned social worker Celestina Zalduondo to be its first director. The assistant director, Rafaela Espino noted that the division was the "parent Bureau of the whole Administration."²²¹ The program was especially important because the entire PRERA project, and arguably the New Deal itself, rested on separating out those deserving of relief. Social workers drew on their experiences in the Second Units to develop casework methods that allowed them

²²⁰ Manuel Rodriguez, *A New Deal for the Tropics: Puerto Rico During the Depression Era, 1932-1935* (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener, 2010), 57.

²²¹ James Bourne, *First Annual Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration from August 19, 1933, to August 31, 1934* (San Juan, P.R.: Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1935).



Figure II. 3. “The Social Worker visits a poor district. Guayama, P.R.” Bourne, *First Annual Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration*.

to determine eligibility for relief while also creating a bureaucracy that manage this new type of knowledge about the population. They created new metrics for means testing that could be used to screen relief applicants, even creating three levels of need that applicants were listed beneath. In these roles they managed the creation of both direct relief programs that distributed food and monetary payments as well as work relief programs that offered paid employment on state run projects.²²²

²²² James Bourne, *First Annual Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration*.

The PRERA's development resulted in the separation of Puerto Ricans along class lines associated with specific occupations, as well as the creation and reinforcement of a gendered division of labor. There was a "White Collar Work" program that placed workers considered skilled or educated into administrative positions in the agency itself. The majority of other applicants deemed unskilled were given work in development and construction projects.²²³ Because there were not enough trained social workers to staff the PRERA programs its directors decided to hire untrained social work aides managed by the Second Unit social workers who became the agencies directors.²²⁴ According to Rafaela Espino, "In the beginning, investigators were taken from relief rolls, on the basis of their own need for relief rather than preparation for the service."²²⁵ These aides were sometimes relief applicants with high school diplomas, however over time most selected had some college experience. Espino noted that, "experience quickly demonstrated the need for competent personnel, and a compromise between need and efficiency had to be made." Despite the fact that the agency tried to only have district directors and bureau heads with professional social work training, the demand for social workers was too high, and aides were also placed in executive positions. The result was that growing numbers of applicants for relief entered administrative roles in PRERA, expanding the professional ranks. The placement of aides reveals how the New Deal opened up new

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ For more on the structure of the social work program see: James Bourne, *First Annual Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration from August 19, 1933, to August 31, 1934* (San Juan, P.R.: Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1935), 65. "Every town throughout the island had a representative of the social work division. The island was divided into 12 districts with five to eight municipalities in each one. Usually the largest municipalities housed the headquarters. The local offices have a town head in charge, which employed the aides to support the operations of the Bureau. The bureau also had sub-offices in distant rural communities."

²²⁵ James Bourne, *First Annual Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration*, 30.

spaces for social mobility and suggests that not all government agents came from elite or middle class backgrounds.²²⁶

Work Relief for Women

While some women qualified for these professional jobs, the majority of applicants were sent to a separate “Women’s Work Division.” This agency was created to give “relief to a comparatively large group and class of people” that “are not well enough prepared to be able to take advantage of the White Collar Relief.”²²⁷ The majority were employed in a state sponsored home needlework program and were given cloth pieces they made into garments in exchange for relief tokens. The program had a “secondary relief aspect, because the majority of items were distributed to other relief applicants through the Social Service Division.” In this way, relief applicants were put to work creating goods that could be used by other poor Puerto Ricans. The creation of government sponsored needlework program shored up the already existing home needlework economy that declined during the depression, but remained the largest employer of women on the island.²²⁸ Through their work in this industry, Puerto Rican women already had become active members of the labor force and labor unions and were

²²⁶ The recruitment and training of social work “aides” led to some people that were not elites to enter the profession of social work. See Manuel Rodriguez, *A New Deal for the Tropics*, 65.

²²⁷ In the United States the women’s work program of FERA was overseen by Ellen Woodward, which gave jobs to many “white collar” workers in the U.S. Woodward went on to direct WPA programs for women. See: Martha Swain, *Ellen S. Woodward New Deal Advocate for Women* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1995).

²²⁸ For more on the history of the needlework industry in Puerto Rico see: María del Carmen Baerga. *Género y trabajo: la industria de la aguja en Puerto Rico y el Caribe hispánico* (San Juan, P.R.: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1993), Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

providing crucial financial support to their families. The centrality of labor programs for women within the PRERA suggests that there was a growing concern among policymakers about providing work to for women. Although the U.S. based New Deal project largely rested on the idea of providing relief to male breadwinners supporting their families, these concepts were far from the reality and lived experience of Puerto Ricans. The early PRERA programs embraced the idea of Puerto Rican women as breadwinners, creating work relief programs and by expanding vocational education programs for women and girls.

Women's activism during the period pushed the state to recognize that they were workers, who depended on waged labor to support their families and communities. Demanding work, not relief, these women questioned the gendered discrimination that they faced within New Deal organizations. One way that women in the needlework industry organized in the period was by creating unions of the "unemployed," that led massive strikes around the island.²²⁹ Historian Blanca Silvestrini has noted how women's demands for work challenged assumptions that Puerto Ricans were content with receiving state relief.²³⁰ Women faced greater job insecurity because regulations of the needlework industry had led many companies to consider abandoning Puerto Rico to find cheaper workers elsewhere. Historian María del Carmen Baerga has documented how women often felt alienated from labor unions because they were more concerned with having a right to work as women. Because of this they were sometimes willing to accept lower wages in order to support their families, causing frictions with labor organizations

²²⁹ María del Carmen Baerga. *Género y trabajo*.

²³⁰ Blanca Silvestrini-Pacheco, "Women as Workers: The Experience of the Puerto Rican Woman in the 1930's." See Ref 203 (1975): 247-60.

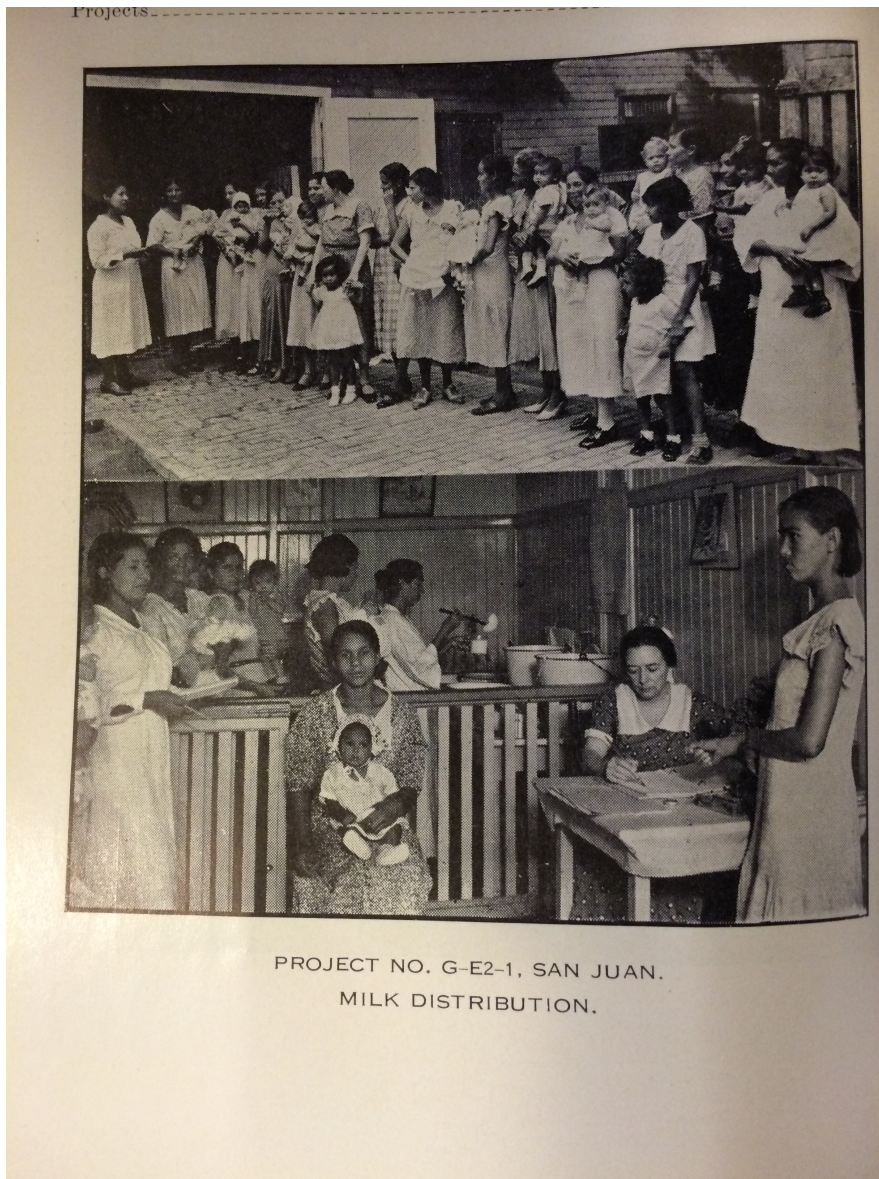


Figure II.4. "Milk Distribution" From: Bourne, *First Annual Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration*.

and reformers.²³¹ She notes that Felicia Boria, a social worker who became the director of the Bureau of Women and Children in Industry spoke openly about the negative impacts

²³¹ María del Carmen Baerga, "Puerto Rico: From Colony to Colony." *Creating and Transforming Households: The Constraints of the World-Economy* (1992): 121.

that protective legislation had on many working women. Administrators believed that the need for training women in needlework “will remain after relief work has ended.”²³²

They created twenty-five new “industrial schools” that were similar to the ongoing vocational programs in home economics already taught in the public schools. PRERA estimated that 13,216 people (a number that included students and their families) were financially benefiting from these work relief salaries. The quantification of this number suggests how New Deal reformers were acutely aware of the centrality of women and girls work in supporting families and communities. Women and girls were “given courses in cooking, sewing, administration of the home, hygiene and care of the sick, and servant training.” The program also provided immediate work relief because the students were paid one dollar a week for their participation. This was in addition to the larger goal of the program that its directors noted was to “prepare girls to earn a living.” In addition to the work relief programs, social workers also managed a larger network of other programs that targeted women and children. These programs provided immediate assistance and also were meant to cause lasting changes in clients behaviors. They ran distribution centers of direct relief where food and financial support for shelter were provided.

Social workers also helped develop an expansive health service network that provided free medical care, milk stations that distributed milk to mothers of small children, and school lunch programs in public schools run in collaboration with parent and teacher associations. PRERA also developed nursery schools for poor families that they claimed “lay the foundation for a ‘sound mind in a sound body’ and tend to prevent

²³² James Bourne, *First Annual Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration*.

these tots from becoming a social problems when they are adults.” In addition they created maternal health programs, some of which disseminated birth control, which became a topic of great controversy about the programs.²³³ Throughout their public health work, social workers and public health nurses lectured working class people about proper nutrition and parenting, echoing concepts that had been at the heart of social work training in the Second Unit Rural Schools. In doing so, they drew on popular ideas of progressive eugenics and puericulture that promoted the idea that a healthy nation would result from interventions in the health, hygiene, and moral lives of poor citizens.²³⁴

The Politics of Professionalization

During the first year tensions surfaced among social workers over defining professional status as the field changed because of the inclusion of aides. Some social workers objected to the aides being considered social workers and proposed that the profession should be regulated.²³⁵ This push was led by the members of the “Porto Rico Association of Trained Social Workers,” a group of social workers that were all trained in U.S. schools and represented an older and more conservative group. The association protested the aides being called social workers in popular discourse, and also argued that social workers trained at the University of Puerto Rico and empirical social workers that

²³³ For more on the birth control aspects: Annette B. Ramirez de Arellano and Conrad Seipp, *Colonialism, Catholicism, and Contraception: A History of Birth Control in Puerto Rico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983). Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*.

²³⁴ For more on the history of eugenics in other areas of Latin America see: Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Cornell University Press, 1991).

²³⁵ Georgina A. Pastor, *History and Development of the Laws Licensing Social Workers in Puerto Rico* (M.S.W. Thesis, Washington University, 1943).

didn't have degrees but had been working in the field for many years, should also have to be licensed.²³⁶ Social worker Georgina Pastor, who had been educated at the UPR noted that “the word ‘trained’ in the title of this Association came to be a type of insult directed at the empirical social workers.”²³⁷ Pastor also stated that its members “obviously were trying to create a classist organization, representing the so called “ninas bien” of the middle and upper classes.” According to Blanca Canales the group “except for Celestina Zalduono” began to look down on social workers and “said that we didn't have the necessary education to call ourselves social workers.”²³⁸

Social worker and government agencies responded in varied ways to the campaign to license social workers. Some PRERA administrators were against regulation because they believed the need for practitioners of social work outweighed these concerns. Some explicitly believed this was a way of policing the upward social mobility of working class women into the professional realm, which sought to restrict the expansion of a field that opened up more professional jobs for women. Despite these protests, social work was regulated in 1935, with the passing of a new public welfare law later considered the first law of its kind in the Americas.²³⁹ Shortly afterwards a Junta Examinadora was created by the insular government, which issued permanent and provisional licenses to social workers. The first Junta was appointed by the Puerto Rican government and was composed of social workers representing what were considered the main groups within the field. This group included Beatriz Lassalle, despite the fact that

²³⁶ Nilsa Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras de la profesion*, 39.

²³⁷ Oral history with Georgina Pastor in: Nilsa Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras de la profesion*, 42.

²³⁸ Oral history with Blanca Canales: in Nilsa Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras de la profesion*, 40.

²³⁹ Nilsa Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras de la profesion*.

she had been against the regulation of the field. Then a new professional organization that included all licensed social worker was created in April 1935 called the “Sociedad Insular de Trabajadores Sociales.” The organization elected Carmen Rivera de Alvarado as its first president.²⁴⁰

Carmen Rivera de Alvarado later wrote about how the first assembly of the organization in Rio Piedras was a formative moment in the development of the field because it opened up a new platform for political organization and debate amongst social workers. They used these meetings to lobby the insular and federal government for the expansion of social welfare services. The first task that they addressed was to develop strategies to advocate for the creation of a Department of Public Welfare in the Puerto Rican government, a task that would require changes to the Organic Act of the island. Carmen Rivera de Alvarado noted that, “cent by cent they raised the funds to send a delegation to Washington in April 1936 to solicit the Resident Commissioner, socialist Don Santiago Iglesias,” asking him to present a law that would authorize the creation of this department. The social workers sent included Beatriz Lassalle, Celestina Zalduondo, and María Pintado, who presented their work in front of the House of Representatives.²⁴¹ While at first these petitions were unsuccessful, they signaled new types of organizing by professional social workers that would continue over the proceeding years. Thus, the social work organization that had been created to regulate professional status was now taking on a new role, providing the social workers within a platform to intervene as experts and lobbyists.

²⁴⁰ Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, *Lucha y vision*.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

Conflicts Among the Reformers: PRERA and the “Chardon Plan”

The social and economic changes ushered in with PRERA were coupled with political shifts as the U.S. government also began changing its relationship with Puerto Rico as the New Deal transformations reached a pinnacle in 1934. U.S. and Puerto Rican officials embarked upon new colonial reforms that began when the island was transferred from the War Department to Department of Interior. Puerto Rico was now under the leadership of new administrators, including Ernest Gruening a liberal political figure, and a new governor, Blanton Winship, with military experience. Marking these changes, first lady Eleanor Roosevelt traveled by plane to Puerto Rico accompanied by a group of reporters to present these interventions to U.S. audiences.²⁴² Roosevelt was accompanied by Lorena Hickock who was a representative of FERA and later and wrote a report on Puerto Rico and labor conditions in the United States Caribbean possessions. On the same plane was Rexford Tugwell, a member of Franklin Roosevelt’s “brain trust” who met with Puerto Rican officials about the possibility of agricultural reform. He drafted a "Tropical Policy Report" based on his trip in which he outlined an agricultural rehabilitation that would break U.S. sugar estates into small farms and distributed them to farmers. These ideas were later adapted into the "Chardon Plan," a new program for the island created in collaboration with Puerto Rican reformers. These interlocutors included

²⁴² She traveled by plane with a group of women reporters that documented her trip in a variety of US newspapers. Among the journalists, including Ruby Black, a close friend of the presidents that would also develop an important relationship with LMM, serving as a correspondent for the newspaper that he ran, as well as providing political information for him from Washington and being one of his main advisors on political policy during these crucial years in the development of the PPD. *Empty Without You: The Intimate Letters of Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

social science experts that believed that a social scientifically based planning approach could transform the island. Also among the group was Luis Muñoz Marín, a politician's son who emerged as one of the architects of this new vision of colonial reform and a liberal party leader.²⁴³ U.S. and Puerto Rican reformers argued that a planning approach, led by liberal social scientists and Puerto Rican technocrats could gradually transform Puerto Rico in a modern and industrialized nation.

Eleanor Roosevelt's trip to Puerto Rico also provided the Puerto Rican social workers with a chance to present their work and ideas in a variety of forums. She met with her friend Dorothy Bourne, and Puerto Rican social workers that showed her the social welfare and labor programs they had developed under the New Deal. Bourne introduced the social worker administrators of the PRERA to the first lady and they held a number of discussions about the relief efforts on the island and the development of social welfare and social work in the basement of the governors mansion. Roosevelt met with representatives from a variety of new Deal organizations and toured poor neighborhoods. Social workers showed her the conditions faced by both urban and rural workingwomen in the tobacco and needlework industries. In addition, the social workers were Roosevelt's guides as she traveled around the island and saw the living conditions of the poor as well as in her visits to the work places of Puerto Rican women. In addition, much attention was paid to visiting women workers on the island, and she was shown to

²⁴³ For Muñoz Marín the creation of the "Chardon Plan" and the reforms that it instigated also opened up a space to create a new political platform and party on the island, the Partido Popular Democrático. The party was officially created in 1938 and it would take only a few years for the Muñoz Marín to consolidate political power, becoming first the President of the Insular Senate, and soon afterwards the chosen political figure of the U.S. state.

some of the projects underway for women and workers by the social workers themselves.²⁴⁴

The creation of PRERA was linked to the liberal party and other political groups saw it as providing patronage to that parties supporters. PRERA social workers became the targets of questioning about the objectivity of the agency and its distribution of resources. There were debates and discussions in a number of public forums.²⁴⁵ The social work aides were targeted by the coalition against the liberal party. These discourses were made in largely gendered ways, arguing that these women proposed immoral living among poor women. The unification of the coalition with the Catholic Church against the New Deal and liberal linked party resulted in an even more expansive attack on the social workers. They specifically targeted the creation of maternal health programs that provided birth control, but also broadly described social workers as lacking professional training. One of the leaders, Father McGowan, argued that the majority of social workers had received no training and were running a completely disorganized agency. As evidence he pointed to articles published in PRERA's journal *La Rehabilitacion*, that he claimed promoted ideas of free love, birth control, and advocated against marriage, the family, and the home. Dorothy Bourne argued against him in a point by point response to his claims stating that while there were flaws in the social work program these charges were unfair and the program had done much good.²⁴⁶ Bourne

²⁴⁴ The Puerto Rican social workers remembered their experiences with her as formative and important, Carmen Rivera de Alvarado included an image of her showing Roosevelt around a food distribution program for women workers in the tobacco industry. Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, *Lucha y vision*.

²⁴⁵ Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, Annette B. Ramírez de Arellano and Conrad Seipp. *Colonialism, Catholicism, and Contraception: A History of Birth Control in Puerto Rico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

²⁴⁶ Ibid

sidestepped many of the questions about birth control, saying that these questions were in the hands of doctors and nurses, rather than social workers. The attack was successful in restricting the social work programs that were underway, and also on putting pressure on political figures to end the maternal health programs that they had already created.

The Chardon Plan resulted in the creation of a new relief agency called the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) under the directorship of Ernest Gruening. The PRRA was imagined as an alternative to the PRERA and shortly after it was created the New Deal administrators in Puerto Rico began the process of liquidating the first agency. The main role of PRRA was to expand work relief programs that were development oriented. Many of the PRERA administrators were critical of the new program which they believed ended programs that were working well and that should be continued. For example, Earl Parker Hanson argued that the PRERA was unfairly being framed as a “dole” when in fact it had also provided expansive work relief programs coupled with much needed direct assistance. Hanson also pointed out that one of the main gaps in the PRRA was that it did not address the large numbers of women that were heads of household and were in need of assistance. James Bourne also highlighted this problem in an article from June 1936, arguing “The worst feature of the whole reconstruction program... is that it is wholly lacking in provisions for aiding women, when it is estimated 50,000 island women are the sole supporters of their families.”²⁴⁷ He also lamented the end of the Social Service Division programs. The transition to the PRRA didn’t mean a total end to all programs it just meant a reorientation of the state

²⁴⁷ “Relief Head Scores Puerto Rican Workers: J.R. Bourne Says Gruening Projects Fail to Give Aid to Many Island People,” *The New York Times*, June 22, 1936, 8.



Figure II.5. "Se inicia el trabajo social en todo la isla en cooperacion con los centros medicos" PRRA Images, University of Puerto Rico Collection, Vol. 8, Number 18 .

towards creating new labor camps for men that targeted men as male breadwinners. This was a shift in the gendered dynamic of the programs away from creating work for women. In this new vision women would be the targets of relief rather than work, which they directly protested in a number of public demonstrations.

The Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration and the Silencing of Dissent

When Rafaela Espino was hired by the Puerto Rican government to oversee the transition from the PRERA to PRRA, she wrote about her experience creating the *Unidad*

de Servicio Social in the PRRA in 1935.²⁴⁸ She mentioned that in 1936 the program was broadened into a Section of Social Service, which focused on working with rural families that were picked to participate in the program. She also noted that in each of the twenty labor camps that were created there was a “visitante social” and that out of these twelve were trained social workers, while the others held BA degrees. The social workers developed forms of group work in these settings and picked community leaders that ran additional activities. In addition they worked in collaboration with health dispensaries that began running after 1936 and specialized in both preventative and curative medicine. Espino noted that social workers group was multidimensional, they did “work with families, medical social work, and group work.”

Attacks on the liberal party coincided with a government crackdown on labor and nationalist organizing under Governor Blanton Winship. The police led a new campaign against the growing nationalist movement, resulting a number of violent clashes. Among them was the Ponce Massacre on March 21, 1937, when nineteen people were killed and 200 wounded when police attacked a march protesting the arrest of nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos. This event led to the political transformation of PRRA director Ernest Gruening, who became more politically conservative, anti-nationalist, and moved away from his previous sympathies with the liberal party.²⁴⁹ Gruening began a purge of state officials he deemed sympathetic to nationalists, attacking among others Dorothy and James Bourne and Earl Parker Hanson.²⁵⁰ The U.S. officials in Puerto Rico responded in

²⁴⁸ Rafaela Espino, “Trabajo social dentro de un programa de reconstruccion”, *Revista de Servicio Social*.

²⁴⁹ Thomas Mathews, *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960).

²⁵⁰ Earl Parker Hanson, *Transformation: The Story of Modern Puerto Rico* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955).

different ways to the violence. For her part, Dorothy Bourne published an article on the state of social welfare in Puerto Rico that discussed the Ponce Massacre, and argued that the colonial situation in Puerto Rico couldn't be ignored or avoided. She argued that a main issue that faced any project on the island, particularly that of social workers was a "colonial psychology" that impacted all their work, and hindered what they were trying to accomplish.²⁵¹ Bourne's sympathies were with the social workers, as she became increasingly disheartened by the limitations of the colonial project that she had played a central role in constructing, and as she worked alongside and became close friend with nationalist women like Carmen Rivera de Alvarado.²⁵² Despite Gruening's attacks on the Bournes, James Bourne was kept on the staff of PRRA and given the directorship of the relief aspects of the agency, which he abandoned soon afterwards because of the political tensions that continued to plague the agencies work.²⁵³ Gruening also purged nationalist social workers from government organizations, making it more and more difficult for them to get work, and leading what a social work observer from the U.S. called a sort of "Spanish Inquisition" within the government. As a result, the field became an increasingly political charged terrain, and moved towards more conservative politics at the end of the decade. The political platforms created within social work organizations

²⁵¹ Bourne, *Thirty Years of Change*.

²⁵² Dorothy D. Bourne, "Puerto Rico's Predicament" *The Survey*, June 1936: 200-201.

²⁵³ One of the results of this controversy that the Bourne's were attacked because they had two members of their family working for the New Deal agencies, and there were rules against this happening that they attempted to enforce. Dorothy Bourne tried to respond by saying that she was only serving the agency in an advisory capacity, and that her main work was running the social work program at the University of Puerto Rico. However, there were still problems and the couple ended up leaving Puerto Rico because of the attacks they faced from the Puerto Rican political coalition and from Gruening. Thomas Mathews, *A New Deal for Puerto Rico*.



Figure II.6. : "Aparece la trabajadora social entrevistando a una familia en la zona rural." PRRA Collection, University of Puerto Rico, Vol. 10, Number 8.

proved to be more and more important as PRERA was liquidated. Social workers sought alternative paths to social change and the expansion of relief as the program ended. In particular, they sought assistance for women who had been left off the PRRA programs that had replaced the first programs, and that had only focused on employing men. One of the main rallying points that social workers found was in arguing for the extension of the Social Security Act of 1935 to the island, despite the fact that the island had been excluded from the original legislation. The *Sociedad Insular de Trabajadores Sociales* raised money to send delegations to U.S. social work meetings and exerted pressure on U.S. reformers to change the law. The main voice of PR in the US at this point was the island's representative Santiago Iglesias Pantín, who the social workers met with, and

who was the one to introduce the amendments to the U.S. Congress that moved for the island to be included under the law.²⁵⁴ The group also wrote emphatic letters to the U.S. Congress arguing that the island should be included under the Social Security Act. While these petitions were unsuccessful, social workers maintained pressure on professional organizations, unions, social welfare leaders, and U.S. Congressmen. They also made arguments about the United States responsibilities towards its citizens, and therefore evoked New Deal about the rights and benefits of Puerto Rican citizenship. They did this in the face of Puerto Rican citizenship being repeatedly defined in colonial legislation and policy as different and second-class.

Social Welfare and the “Nation on the Move

During the 1930s the migration of growing numbers of Puerto Rican workers to the United States changed discourses about Puerto Ricans rights to social citizenship in new ways. This section explores how the politics of welfare and migration became increasingly intertwined during the decade by exploring how New Deal social workers entered new roles as experts on Puerto Rican migration. Although social workers were overwhelmed by the demand for relief locally they were drawn into efforts to help New York city deal with the small but substantial Puerto Rican population that had begun to form in the United States. They were available to do this work because increasing numbers of social workers during the New Deal had traveled to the United States to

²⁵⁴ Cite the U.S. Congressional hearings



II.7. "Grupo de directores del Trabajo de Servicio Social." PRRA Collection, University of Puerto Rico, Vol 15, Number 6, January 1937.

receive professional degrees and many of them were sponsored by grants given by PRERA and PRRA. In the United States they were called upon by both the United States and Puerto Rican governments to connect social welfare programs on the island with those in the United States.

As social workers simultaneously built the welfare state in Puerto Rico and developed new bureaucratic practices and social services oriented specifically towards the growing migrant community in New York City, social workers developed a set of Puerto Rican social services that were particularly constructed with questions about migration and migrant citizenship at their core. As social workers built more expansive transnational links between the U.S. and Puerto Rican social welfare agencies, like an

expansive inter-agency service program, they continued to encounter controversy over what the rights of Puerto Rican citizens were, particularly regarding residency requirements and restrictions. Social workers argued that questions about Puerto Rican citizenship would be best addressed if Puerto Ricans on the island had access to the rights and benefits of full social welfare provisions like they were legally entitled to if they migrated to the United States. In order to organize towards this goal they continued to push for the extension of the Social Security Act, and by seeking new transnational political alliances with politicians in New York.

In the 1930s their travels to study and work were recounted in the pages of their professional journals, where they made passing references to their experiences as students.²⁵⁵ The large majority studied at the New York School of Social Work or the School of Social Service at the University of Chicago.²⁵⁶ Sometimes they gave more detailed descriptions about their educational experiences and interviews with their peers or historical sketches about the development of social work in Puerto Rico. The biographical information they sprinkled into these narratives reveals how social workers became links between United States and Puerto Rican schools and social service agencies. These stories also reference social work residencies, placements, fieldwork, and investigations in the United States. When they arrived to study in United States cities, Puerto Rican social workers encountered, and joined, migrant Puerto Rican and “Spanish-speaking communities.” As students their training was largely composed of residencies in social service institutions and conducting research and fieldwork for

²⁵⁵ These travels were documented in the *Revista de Servicio Social* and *Bienestar Público*

²⁵⁶ Check the exact name of the school at this period- it changed a number of times over the years, and wasn’t always a part of the University of Chicago, but was actually kept separate from the rest of the University as discussed in Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*.

projects directed by faculty. They were often asked or expected to work on Puerto Rican topics, and while some wrote about the island, others focused their work on migrant communities. Students were given jobs as interpreters and asked to speak and write about Puerto Rican culture, documenting the Puerto Rican diaspora in progress. In so doing, these social workers became experts on both Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican migration to the United States. They were also asked about how to adjust or integrate Puerto Ricans into United States communities and develop channels of information, regulation, and casework that would link together social service agencies in the United States with those in Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rican Social Work Students as Migration Experts

Professional social work migrants sometimes documented their own experiences in the United States as a part of their master's thesis projects. For example, Manuel F. Rodriguez, a social worker funded by the Department of Education to study at the New York School of Social Work, wrote a thesis that sheds light on these experiences.²⁵⁷ Rodriguez's writings illustrate how interconnected the development of social welfare for Puerto Ricans on the island was to those in the United States. He explored the transnational development of the field of social welfare in his thesis, "A Study of Puerto Ricans in New York and their Difficulties in Adjusting to Cosmopolitan Life." Completed in January 1938, the study is an investigation of the so-called "Puerto Rican problem" in New York bound up in a brooding meditation on the writers difficult two

²⁵⁷ While the majority of these social workers were women, there were a handful of men in the field were often groomed for leadership positions in state agencies.

years in the city.²⁵⁸ Rodriguez introduced his work by tracing the development of social work in Puerto Rico and describing the impact of New Deal programs. He also documented how Puerto Rican social workers were in the middle of fighting for the extension of the Social Security Act.²⁵⁹ Next, he explored how Puerto Rican migrants had received an icy reception in U.S. social welfare agencies during the 1930s. This treatment was exacerbated by xenophobic articles published in the local press that cast Puerto Ricans as carriers of disease, poverty, and depraved morals. As historian Lorrin Thomas has shown these discourses were also closely entangled with questions about the rights of Puerto Ricans as U.S. citizens, which included whether they were eligible for relief.²⁶⁰ Puerto Ricans that did seek assistance were legally entitled to benefits but were often perceived of as foreigners and denied access. As migration intensified questions remained about whether Puerto Ricans on the island and in the U.S. would be included in new state and federal social welfare provisions.

Rodriguez's study provides a window into how Puerto Rican migrants were being handled within New York relief agencies. He interviewed to groups; First, Puerto Rican migrants that had sought assistance at a city health center because they had tuberculosis.

²⁵⁸ His thesis director was Mary Antoinette Cannon, a well-known social worker that had co-authored foundational studies on casework method and writing, and who was an early proponent of "community organization" oriented social work practice. Cannon later played an important role in the development of Puerto Rican social work when she traveled to Puerto Rico in the early 1940s to revamp the social work training program on the island. She also served as one of the experts that designed and ran the social work section of the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor after 1948. A scholarship named in her honor funded numerous Puerto Rican social workers attendance in U.S. institutions after this period, including the activist Antonia Pantoja. Can also cite her own thesis in community organizing. Marie Antoinette Cannon, "Courses in Social Work at the University of Puerto Rico" *Revista de Servicio Social*.

²⁵⁹ Nilsa Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras de la profesion*.

²⁶⁰ Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*.

Second, social welfare officials directing agencies with Puerto Rican clients.²⁶¹ He sent survey questions ahead so that the social welfare agents could prepare themselves for the interviews. However, in one case he talked with an unprepared social worker that treated him with hostility and racism. Rodriguez's investigation of the Puerto Rican "problem" is troubled when the lines between himself and the subjects of his investigation are blurred and he begins to feel that he is also being read as a part of the "problem." Through his work, he discovered that migration had rendered illegible or fuzzy, what before he had taken for granted: his whiteness, middle-class status, and the authority, honor, and power that came with his masculinity. In his text he mulls over how privilege is tempered or lost in transit, and how "Puerto Rican" became a non-white racial categorization, erasing hierarchies ascribed back home. Thus, in the U.S., even a Puerto Rican professional could be read as a potential "dependent" on relief.²⁶² His thesis is a narrative explicitly presented to a U.S. audience from the standpoint of a native expert, suggesting he was expected or felt compelled to speak as a representative of all Puerto Ricans.²⁶³ In the end, it also becomes a treatise on professional migration, a story about the politics of race, class, and gender in the diaspora, full of angry ALL CAPS pronouncements.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Historian Solsieree del Moral has documented similar feelings expressed by Puerto Rican teachers in the U.S. during this period, and illustrated how they simultaneously wanted to shore up divisions that gave them status and fought the portrayal of all Puerto Ricans as racially and intellectually inferior. Solsieree del Moral, *Negotiating Empire The Cultural Politics of Schools in Puerto Rico, 1898-1952*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013.

²⁶³ Although it was his thesis director that recommended he include the actual interview data, not just the summaries he provided in the study.

²⁶⁴ Manuel F. Rodriguez "A Study of the Puerto Ricans in New York and their Difficulties in Adjusting to Cosmopolitan Life," Unpublished MA Thesis, New York School of Social Work, January 1938.

Rodriguez interviewed A. A. Buffington, one of the members of the “Puerto Rican Committee” of the Welfare Council of New York that had been investigating Puerto Rican migration since 1930. Buffington also shared the organizations meeting minutes and a report written by Rose McHugh, a social worker and active member of Pan-American discourses over the development of social welfare. McHugh’s findings, titled “Puerto Ricans in New York City” had also been submitted to the White House Conference on Child Health in 1930. Like other studies of the time McHugh’s findings suggested that migrants were not making up a large percentage of relief applicants despite the claims of sensationalist news stories. Rodriguez encountered many other social work personnel with Latin American and Puerto Rican work experience, some who had worked for U.S. organizations like the American Red Cross and the Rockefeller Foundation. The consistent flow of U.S. professionals to the island continued to expand under the New Deal and there were growing numbers of U.S. professionals with links to Puerto Rico. Studies on Puerto Rican communities in the U.S. continued to be influenced by transnational and international discourses on children’s rights and social welfare, as well as by the circulation of professionals. The Puerto Rican government had also become directly involved in regulating migration when it created an office called the Bureau of Employment and Identification in 1930. Rodriguez interviewed its director, Vivaldi about the agency’s work and the office it had established in Harlem. While the agency serviced multiple functions, its main role was to provide identification cards that proved Puerto Ricans were U.S. citizens, documents that were often needed when migrants were perceived as foreign and they faced discrimination. It also provided job placement services like other city employment offices.²⁶⁵ While the Harlem office’s work

²⁶⁵ Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*.

was limited, it still became a hub of activity, and a place where Puerto Ricans went with question about access to relief.²⁶⁶

The “Transportation Cases” and Puerto Rican Resettlement

Social workers in the U.S. regulated migration by sending Puerto Ricans back to the island through a program of “resettlement” based on residency status. The formation and enforcement of residency status requirements for relief was a part of the creation of social services often used to discriminate against those that were deemed undeserving of state funds. Scholarship on the history of race and social welfare in the United States has highlighted how African American communities became the targets of these discriminatory residency requirements during the 1930s. Manuel Rodriguez also documented this practice in his thesis, he interviewed a representative of the Non-Settlement Division of the Department of Welfare and discussed the agencies transportation of Puerto Ricans back to the island.²⁶⁷ The agents said it was done only in rare cases. Migrants were returned if it was determined that they were going to be “public charges,” a vague categorization not defined in the article, but which seemed to suggest a permanent state.²⁶⁸ He claimed this course of action was only taken if social workers could determine the migrant had access to better family conditions and support back

²⁶⁶ Lawrence Chenault, *The Puerto Rican Migrant in New York City*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1938.

²⁶⁷ Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*.

²⁶⁸ The question of “public charges” also surfaced in earlier discussions of the citizenship and mobility of Puerto Ricans. Sam Erman, “Meanings of Citizenship in the U.S. Empire: Puerto Rico, Isabel Gonzalez, and the Supreme Court, 1898 to 1905,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*. 27, no. 2008, 4: 5-33

home. In the majority of cases investigated by the agency social workers they suggested migrants should return, but it was not a policy to return all migrants.

The agency corresponded with Puerto Rican social welfare agencies about migrants through a new Inter-agency services bureau. Each of the cases was sent to Beatriz Lassalle, who served as the chief of the Bureau of Social Welfare during this period.²⁶⁹ They may have done this through correspondence or through visits to the homes of family members of the clients and interviews with them about whether the client could be integrated back into the home or supported by the family income. The information would be sent back to the New York agency, and in cases where the Puerto Ricans social workers decided that return migration was advisable, the New York agency would pay for the transportation of the client back to Puerto Rico. Beatriz Lassalle hired a social worker from the U.S. named Frances Adkins Hall to deal with these cases. Hall had moved with her husband to Puerto Rico when he received an appointment to teach language courses at the University of Puerto Rico. While in Puerto Rico she documented her experiences in a journal she kept with her husband about their experiences and her work as a social worker.²⁷⁰ While Hall's trip was short lived her record of the events surrounding the creation of inter-agency services provides a window into the formation of state policy towards Puerto Rican migration in the aftermath of PRERA.

²⁶⁹ The first chapter of my dissertation is a biography of Beatriz Lassalle, a seasoned social welfare leader and reformer who advocated for the extension of social policy to Puerto Rico. Lassalle had extensive experience as a social worker and was one of the first Puerto Rican social worker to be trained in the U.S., before developing early child and family oriented social welfare programs in Puerto Rico in the 1920s.

²⁷⁰ Frances Adkins Hall and Robert A. Hall, *The Puerto Rican Journal (1937-1939)* Ithaca, NY, 1979. Frances Adkins Hall, "The Problem of the Migration of Indigent Puerto Ricans to and from New York City" *Puerto Rico Health Bulletin* 3, no 12, December 1939: 495-504. Frances Adkins Hall, "Social and Economic Conditions in Puerto Rico" *Puerto Rico Health Bulletin*, 3, No 7, July 1939.

Frances Hall was a specialist in social work who conducted a large study for the Children's Bureau while in Puerto Rico, sending the manuscript back and forth by boat between her revisions. She was already connected to a number of the Puerto Rican social workers from the US with whom she had spent time with while working in social agencies in the U.S. She was not immediately hired by the Department of Health's Social Service Department, it took some time for her appointment to be approved, although her candidacy was supported by Lassalle. She developed a friendly relationship with Lassalle, who took her on car trips around the island, showing her some of the social welfare projects underway, including new public welfare offices and PRRA work camps where social workers were stationed.²⁷¹ On these expeditions Hall met social workers working in a number of different fields and saw the various kinds of projects under the umbrella of Lassalle's expanding organization.

Hall's report revealed some of the connections between U.S. and Puerto Rican social workers during the period. Before she began her formal position she became involved in professional organizations on the island and was asked by the US social work association to oversee a study of social conditions in Puerto Rico. This was a part of a large national project, and Hall claimed that she couldn't collect the same data as in other locations because the island didn't have the same social welfare structures and programs as U.S. states.²⁷² Hall outlined some of the main themes in social welfare in Puerto Rico, which were published as an article titled "social and economic conditions' in the Bulletin

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

of Puerto Rico's Department of Health.²⁷³ The study drew from similar material and ideas as the studies that Bourne and her students had done in the previous years. Hall also documented the politics and tensions that were happening in government agencies during this period, she talked about the political purge of government institutions that led to many of those that sympathized with independence being pushed out of the agencies.

Lassalle hired Hall to oversee a study of the transportation cases referred to Puerto Rican social welfare officials from the United States. The first part of which was published as "The Problem of the Migration of Indigent Puerto Ricans To and From New York City," also in the Bulletin of the Puerto Rico's Department of Health.²⁷⁴ Hall received assistance in the work from a committee called the *Consejo de Asistencia Social*, the Department of Health and from students studying social work at UPR. The students were brought on to help compile the information from the case files and to help with analysis of the data as a part of a sociology course they were taking for their degree. They would gain hands on experience doing statistical analysis on case files and receive academic credit for their program. The Puerto Rican students role as research assistants on Hall's project illustrates another space where social workers in training were called upon to study migration, this time on the island. The original goal for this research was to make a comparison of the casework done during the height of PRERA and the work being done in its aftermath and trace the impact of the end of the organization on social services, clients, and migration. According to her report, PRERA had provided funding to help with migrant cases, and overseen "resettlement cases," that ended with the

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Frances Adkins Hall, "The Problem of the Migration of Indigent Puerto Ricans to and from New York City" *Puerto Rico Health Bulletin* 3, no 12, December 1939: 495-504.

liquidation of the agency. However, Hall couldn't get access to the PRERA data and instead decided to refocus the study on how changing residency requirements in New York state had impacted Puerto Rican migrants and transportation cases.

In her study Hall planned to document how the 1937 residency restrictions had “seriously affected the referrals made to Puerto Rico.” During the period 98% of these cases were referred from agencies in New York, with the majority sent by the New York City Department of Welfare and the New York State Department of Welfare. Her study of this material reviewed how changes in welfare laws in the US had disadvantaged Puerto Rican migrants and applicants. This was a law that was working to enforce residency requirements for Puerto Ricans in the United States, and that had led to the New York City Department of Welfare taking over nearly all of the cases, instead of the New York State Department, and that had made a more widespread blanket policy of returning migrants to Puerto Rico. While Hall later abandoned the second part because she believed the case file information was too scattered and incomplete to develop social scientific or statistical analysis in the way she had planned, the study she published provides an overview of the politics of transportation cases and residency requirements at the time.²⁷⁵ Most notable is how residency requirements were increasingly being used to keep recent migrants to northern cities ineligible for benefits. Puerto Rican studies scholars writing about Chicago have noted this issue, like Merida Rua who writes about how Puerto Ricans were thought of a “Non-Resident” Persons. The results of these migrations were that social workers were asked to devise ways of linking together social

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

services in both locating, making migration manageable, and overseeing social services for a population on the move.

As a result of this research, Hall was asked by Lassalle to oversee a revamping of this casework project. One of her goals in this position was to streamline the work by creating form letters and documents and systems to keep track of the transportation cases, as the number expanded. Hall's main role in the agency was to create a bureaucratic system for organizing and managing information about the migrants. Her work included dealing with the correspondence around the cases in the offices of the Department of Health. Hall struggled with the load of work and there ended up being more than she could handle with the limited resources she was given. She also made a trip back to the US to visit family and friends and while in New York she met with US officials on behalf of the Puerto Rican agency about her work with the transportation cases.²⁷⁶ She documented her meetings with U.S. welfare agencies in her journals from the period, although her work for the agency ended shortly afterwards when she and her husband returned to the U.S.

Seeking Alternative Alliances—Vito Marcantonio

Some migrants sought other sources of support, especially from Vito Marcantonio, a New York Congressman from Harlem that became an advocate for his

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

Puerto Rican constituents.²⁷⁷ Marcantonio was a socialist who supported labor organizations and built a relationship with the Puerto Rican community. Outside of his offices there were often long lines of people waiting for help with grievances. He employed Spanish-speaking assistants that specifically helped Puerto Ricans. His papers document numerous cases where Puerto Rican turned to him for help when facing discrimination at city agencies, including in public welfare offices. In his role representing Puerto Ricans Vito Marcantonio increasingly operated in a transnational field of politics. Puerto Rican government agencies corresponded with him about numerous concerns, including restrictions on social welfare funding to Puerto Rico. For years he was the main representative of Puerto Rican concerns in Congress because the islanders had no direct representative, only the non-voting representative. He also supported labor organizing and the nationalist cause and traveled to Puerto Rico to protest the arrest of nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos. Marcantonio played a central role in opposing the Tydings Bill for independence that proposed that Puerto Rico be cut off from all federal support and funds immediately, including all relief funds. The bill was the cause of great distress in Puerto Rico, even among those that supported independence but was supported by Gruening and other U.S. officials.²⁷⁸ On both the local and state levels, Puerto Ricans sought political representation through Vito Marcantonio because they didn't have other channels of support. Moreover, as the

²⁷⁷ See: Vito Marcantonio, *I Vote My Conscience: Debates, Speeches and Writings of Vito Marcantonio 1935-1950* (New York: Vito Marcantonio Memorial, 1956). Gerald Meyer, *Vito Marcantonio Radical Politician, 1902-1954* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989).

²⁷⁸ Lorrin Thomas, "'How They Ignore Our Rights as American Citizens': Puerto Rican Migrants and the Politics of Citizenship in the New Deal Era" *Latino Studies* 2, no. 2 (2004): 140-159. Lorrin Thomas. "Resisting the Racial Binary? Puerto Ricans' Encounter with Race in Depression-Era New York City" *Centro Journal* 21.1 (2009): 5-35.

migrant community grew it became increasingly important politically, because migrants had the power to exert pressure on elected U.S. officials. Representatives like Vito Marcantonio could enter new proposals to Congress on behalf of Puerto Rico, despite the islands citizens being formally excluded from representation. Thus, Puerto Rican politics changed, as did the organizing tactics of different groups, as migration continued.

Puerto Rican government officials also sought to impact U.S. policy through Vito Marcantonio, and he worked with PR officials on a few cases in alliances with representatives with more conservative politics meant to expand Puerto Rican rights to social welfare. For example, in 1936 Geraldine Froshcer, the director of Inter-agency services of PRERA, wrote to Vito Marcantonio concerned about the liquidation of the agencies of this department.²⁷⁹ Frosher was a feminist who had lived and worked in Puerto Rico for many years and participated in the suffrage movement.²⁸⁰ As an employee of PRERA she was one of the social workers that traveled in the coalition to ask for the extension of the Social Security Act mentioned at the introduction of this chapter. Frosher wrote to Marcantonio to warn him that the end of PRERA programs and social services was going to result in increased migration and demand for social services in the United States, and particularly in New York City. She also advised him to

²⁷⁹ Geraldine Froshcer to Vito Marcantonio, February 87, 1936. Vito Marcantonio Papers, Box 5, Reel 4, New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Collection.

²⁸⁰ Geraldine Maud Frosher was a women's rights advocate from the United States that had lived in Puerto Rico for many years. In 1917 she had petitioned the United States National Suffrage Association to help support Puerto Rican organizations. She worked closely with Puerto Rican suffrage leader Ana Roque Duprey and served alongside her as the English editor of *El Heraldo de la Mujer- The Woman's Herald*. For more information see: Ida Husted Harper (Ed), *The History of Woman Suffrage, 1900-1920: Volume IV*, (New York: J. J. Little & Ives Company, 1922), 724.

meet with some New Deal representatives with Puerto Rican experience, including Dorothy Bourne.²⁸¹

Froscher stressed that the impending end of PRERA programs had caused distress on the island, and that direct and work relief recipients and their families were discussing migrating to New York City in search of better employment opportunities. Froscher also claimed that potential migrants believed the city, “gives adequate relief, that they can obtain free hospital treatment, and put their children in free institutions.” Moreover, she stated that Puerto Ricans “cannot understand why if they are citizens of the United States they are not citizens of New York,” and “why they are not entitled to receive the same assistance in New York that is provided by New York State and City funds for relief for legal residents of the city.” She went on to say that social welfare officials in Puerto Rico had been trying to discourage migration by publishing articles in local newspapers urging Puerto Ricans not to migrate to the United States, as well as sending representatives to towns on the island to do the same. However, both “ex-employees of the Administration” and “clients who fear they will have no more relief” were still planning on traveling to the city. The letter ends stating, “if something is not done to relieve this situation in Puerto Rico, we are afraid that many of these people will raise the money to go to New York and increase the difficulties that New York is already burdened with.” While there is no response in Marcantonio’s papers to the letter that Froscher wrote, her warning illustrate the way that Puerto Rican migration figured into debates about the dismantling of PRERA.

²⁸¹ Geraldine Froscher to Vito Marcantonio, February 87, 1936. Vito Marcantonio Papers, Box 5, Reel 4, New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Collection

The Puerto Rican New Deal programs had built links between the US and PR, and when they were taken apart it had consequences, which included more displacement and migration. Froscher's letter also points to how New Deal agencies in Puerto Rico had developed connections between social welfare offices via interagency services that allowed them to keep track of migrants and to a certain extent to regulate migration. She stated emphatically that,

Unless some provision is made to continue the present set-up of relief in Puerto Rico, or a Dept. of Public Welfare is established in Puerto Rico, we will be unable to continue the assistance that we have been able to give the New York State Dept., of Social Welfare, the New York City Dept. of Public Welfare, the New York City Dept. of Hospitals, the Emergency Relief Bureau and the Bureau of Unattached and Transients, in having Puerto Ricans, who are without legal residence in New York, returned to Puerto Rico.²⁸²

The development of social welfare programs on the island and the interconnected development of a Puerto Rican migrant community in New York framed the New Deal social workers' understandings of Puerto Rican migration. The social workers suggested that if fuller social citizenship rights were not extended to the island that this would lead to further disequilibrium, which would draw Puerto Ricans to a place where their citizenship was worth more, because they would have access to relief benefits increasingly unavailable on the island. Over the course of this period, social workers in Puerto Rico had become important advocates for the extension of expanded citizenship rights to the island, an idea that they continued to pitch to the United States government in proceeding years.

²⁸² Ibid.

1939: The Partial Extension of Social Security Act of 1935 to Puerto Rico

The arguments that they made about the need for these expansions in citizenship were rooted in discourses about migration and migrants' rights. One of the ways that social workers had continued to advocate for this was through advocacy for the extension of the Social Security Act of 1935 to Puerto Rico. Santiago Igelisas Pantin, a noted labor organizer who lived and worked in Puerto Rico, who served as Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico between 1933 and 1939 and supported the island becoming a U.S. state. Iglesias was one of the main advocates of the extension of the Social Security Act beginning in 1935 when the Act was passed. Social workers were some of the main constituents that pushed Iglesias to advocate Congress for the Act. These social workers used the new professional platforms they had created in order to put pressure on island representatives in the United States to include Puerto Rico in the Act. One of the activists that wrote a letter and document that was delivered to Iglesias during this period was Beatriz Lassalle. Although unsuccessful in negotiating the inclusion of Puerto Rico under this legislation, he lobbied Congress with the help of other island officials to ask that Puerto Rico be included. The extension of the Social Security Act was just one demand among many that made up the socialist and labor platform of many Puerto Rican labor reformers during his period.²⁸³ Iglesias continued this work while serving as the Resident Commissioner of the island in Washington and after he passed away on December 5, 1939 his son-in-law and fellow socialist leader, Bolivar, took up this work.

²⁸³ Gabriel Villaronga, *Toward a Discourse of Consent: Mass Mobilization and Colonial Politics in Puerto Rico, 1932-1948* (Westport, CN.: Praeger, 2004): 53.

The creation of a new political party and shifting relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico that resulted from New Deal reforms framed a renewed discussion of the possibility of extending the Social Security Act to the island. These shifts began when Luis Muñoz Marín broke with the liberal party and founded the Partido Popular Democrático, a populist party that sought “bread, land, and liberty” for its people through a program of social reform and a “peaceful revolution.” Central to the goals of this party were the administration of reforms that would help working class people, in particular the rural working class “jibaro” became the symbol of PPD leadership, depicted on the parties flag. The PPD also built on the political networks between the U.S. and Puerto Rico that were created under the New Deal, and sought to use a social science and planning approach to the development of the island. One of the main components of this relationship would emerge over the following years as a push towards a continued connection with the U.S., and the creation of a commonwealth state, or Estado Libre Asociado. While it would take over a decade for this change to occur, the new political platform developed by the PPD in 1938 had immediate transformative consequences for Puerto Rican citizens.

In the end the lack of Puerto Rican representation in Congress made it so that a United States official had to introduce the change. Vito Marcantonio ended up providing this political representation by pushing forward the extension of the child and maternal welfare provision of the Act. Historian Gerald Meyer has written about how Vito Marcantonio served as an advocate for Puerto Ricans from both the U.S. and the island by developing a particularly transnational political platform that responded to the needs of his supporters. In addition, he notes that the extension of Social Security to Puerto

Rico was one of Marcantonio's biggest political victories, although he offers little information about how the inclusion of Puerto Rico was negotiated or discussed.²⁸⁴

Meyer also notes how Marcantonio wrote a letter to the editor of *El Mundo*, one of the main newspapers on the island, where he discusses his support of the extension of the Social Security Act to Puerto Rico.²⁸⁵ Eventually, the inclusion of Puerto Rico under the child and maternal welfare provisions of the Social Security Act was accepted by the United States Congress, and the social workers were partially satisfied in the availability of some funds to expand the social service project on the island beyond the legacy of New Deal organizations.

Shortly after the founding of the party one of the first policy changes that resulted was the extension of Title VI of the Social Security Act in 1939. Title VI was considered the maternal and child welfare titles of the act that provided the public assistance coverage of the act, not the social insurance titles which covered workers in industrial occupations. The political influence of the Puerto Rican community in New York was distinctly involved in gaining the attention of the U.S. Congress, that were also aware of the fact that providing these services to Puerto Ricans on the island was being suggested as one potential solution to the Puerto Rican "problem" of migration. The central role that Vito Marcantonio played in extension of these titles shows how important the transnational contours over Puerto Rican citizenship and rights had become. The migrant community figured into later discussions and hearings about the Social Security Act, and

²⁸⁴ Gerald Meyer, *Vito Marcantonio Radical Politician, 1902-1954* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), 156.

²⁸⁵ Gerald Meyer notes that this letter to the editor was published on June 6, 1939. It was particularly about the partial extension of the Social Security Act of 1935 to Puerto Rico. Gerald Meyer, *Vito Marcantonio*.

congressmen openly discussed migration as a concern in their deliberations. While the extension of these titles did create changes, the way that Puerto Ricans were included revealed a continued definition of Puerto Rican rights and citizenships as colonial, and as second class.

The extension of the maternal and child welfare titles of the Social Security Act to Puerto Rico in 1939 served to expand some provisions of the act but also inscribed colonial difference into the emerging welfare state through language that marked Puerto Rico as different than the United States. The passage of the law was predicated upon legal language that defined the island as a different type of “state.” In the “General Provisions” of the law [Section 1101. (a)] it states the following:

When used in this act-

- (1) The term “state” (except when used in sec. 531) includes Alaska, Hawaii, and the District of Columbia, and when used in titles V and VI of such act (including sec. 531) includes Puerto Rico.
- (2) The term “United States” when used in a geographical sense means the states, Alaska, Hawaii, and the District of Columbia.

The specific language that policy makers used to create a differential status for Puerto Rico within the context of social welfare legislation like the Social Security Act is an example of how specific rights and benefits of U.S. citizenship were extended to Puerto Ricans during the period. The need for these types of qualifications is an important part of how territorial difference was constructed during this period. Puerto Rico was to be included under the titles of the Act beginning on January 1st of 1940.

The titles of the Social Security Act that were that were extended to Puerto Rico also served in some ways to continue to divide Puerto Rican citizenship in comparison to

that of those in the mainland. The titles that were extended were considered those that covered dependents, rather than workers who could apply for benefits under the social insurance titles of the act. The division of these types of benefits into separate public assistance acts (meant for dependents) vs. social insurance provisions (for male breadwinners in industrial occupations) worked to divide citizens into gendered categories that had long lasting impacts. The majority of applicants for assistance were working mothers who were imagined as state dependents that were given charity but not considered entitled to the same benefits as male workers.²⁸⁶ The programs that were extended to Puerto Rico were considered the public health measures to Puerto Rico was that the entire islands population was framed as dependent, and in need of the benefits of the public health measures of the act. In particular, the U.S. officials that discussed the extension of the Act particularly discussed how Puerto Rico was overpopulated and in need of the maternal health programs that might help with population control on the island. The types of social policies that were extended to Puerto Rico reflected the larger sexualized and racialized construction of the population within colonial discourses that justified U.S. imperialism.²⁸⁷ Scholarship on the history of race and U.S. citizenship, migration and immigration has explored how public health discourses like these were used to justify the exclusion of certain groups of people from the U.S. and to create and reinforce social hierarchies.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*.

²⁸⁷ As suggested by: Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*.

²⁸⁸ Natalia Molina, *Fit to be Citizens: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006). Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

In 1943 the work of social workers and other organizers in favor of the institutionalization of social welfare in Puerto Rico came to fruition with the creation of the Department of Public Welfare. The Department of Public Welfare in Puerto Rico was developed from the beginning with the understanding that it was providing the infrastructure that the Social Security Act could be grafted onto. The 1943 legislation became known as the “Law of 7.50” because it established a maximum payment of that amount to families or individuals that were determined to be in need. The creation of the department resulted in the expansion of social welfare offices throughout the island. The bureaucratic machinery that was established through the creation of New Deal agencies was expanded and the programs created during this period were handed over to the new department to oversee. Social workers documented how the programs they created during this period were extremely limited by this limited amount of funding. The social workers published a number of articles where they outline the amount of people that they are helping, and how many are actually eligible for the funds, noting that they are covering a tiny percentage of people that are in need. In addition to this program there were also other programs created, like those for institutions of child welfare, foster care, housekeeper home services, and other things.

CHAPTER THREE

Claiming Benefits: Using Microhistory to Explore how Working Class Women Became Clients in Social Welfare Programs after 1943

In 1943, Juana Capó walked into the offices of the Department of Public Welfare in Santurce, Puerto Rico and applied for old age assistance.²⁸⁹ On that day, the social worker assigned to her case was taken with the kindness and vivacity of the elderly woman who offered her details of a fascinating life history. This social worker carefully recorded these details in a case file that begins in looping handwriting. Juana Capó was an elderly widow without children who made her living by working as a seamstress and doing other domestic tasks in the city. She had fallen upon hard times because a knee ailment had made it difficult for her to work and her housing situation had become precarious. In 1946, a young mother of three children named María walked through the same doors, seeking help from social workers because she had contracted tuberculosis

²⁸⁹ Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Departamento de Salud, Departamento de Bienestar Público, Box: 151-A, Case File A-2211 (from here on listed as AGPR Juana Capó.) The files I used for this chapter are located in the Archivo General in San Juan and the records of the Department of Public Welfare are housed in the collections of the Department of Health. While in these archives I reviewed the administrative files of this organization and conducted a close reading of social welfare case files that were taken by social workers administering benefits to Puerto Ricans under these new programs. I have read over hundreds of these case files from the 1940-1965 period, looking at groups of cases from different areas of the island. This paper takes a close look at two of the cases but is informed by my broader reading of case files.

living and working in the urban San Juan neighborhood of La Perla.²⁹⁰ Her ill health and the migration of her husband to the United States had left her in a precarious financial and social situation in the city. As is clear in even these brief accounts, the process of claiming state benefits left behind paper trails that followed the two women for between ten and fifteen years of their lives. Juana Capó would end up negotiating a relationship with the state up until her death in 1957, fifteen years later. María's case in Puerto Rico would only close after she herself migrated to the United States after 1956, likely seeking reunification with her husband.

By pulling at the thread of Juana and María's life histories as they intervene into the larger tapestry of social history I begin the process of weaving a different kind of history. These are not exceptional narratives; they are among hundreds of similar stories of women that applied for assistance during the 1940s. I use these two individual stories to trace the interactions between these clients and state officials within the context of their applications for relief. My investigation shows how the circumstances that brought Juana and María through the doors of the Department of Public Welfare began long before the New Deal and even before they were born. Their lives were shaped by labor patterns, migrations and movements that brought them to the city of San Juan in this decade, in the midst of a radical transformation in the colonial state. When Puerto Ricans entered these social welfare offices they would encounter social workers, recently trained professionals, who would record the details of their claim and initiate the creation of case files that would often document elements of their lives for many years. This chapter

²⁹⁰ Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Departamento de Salud, Departamento de Bienestar Público, Box: 151- A, Case File 3967 (from here on listed as AGPR María) I only reference the first name in this case file out of an attempt to provide privacy for this historical subject. While Juana Capó passed away in 1957, I don't know the later history of María, and decided change her name.

explores these women's experiences collecting aid from a set of new social welfare programs developed by the Puerto Rican insular government under the leadership of social reformers from the *Partido Popular Democrático* (PPD). My reading of these case files shows how these women struggled to lay claim to socioeconomic benefits under emergent social welfare programs.

This chapter also shows how at the same time that applicants struggled to claim rights through their interactions with social workers the social workers themselves were involved in a different but parallel struggle to make arguments supporting the existence of these programs through both insular and federal political activism and organization. One of the main goals of social workers and clients during this period was to get benefits and supports for women, children, elderly, and disabled people that were in financial need. While popular discourse of the period may have portrayed those deserving of need largely as women without access to male breadwinners, both social workers and clients were well aware that many of these applicants were working women who couldn't make ends meet and who were supporting their families and communities. Within new social welfare programs social workers documented the work experiences of women in the case files they collected and clients learned new ways to strategically navigate the intertwined worlds of informal work and government aid. I explore how the struggle for welfare should be considered inseparable from the history of women's labor in Puerto Rico. Integrating the story of welfare into labor history allows for a fuller depiction of working class women's lives and labors to emerge.

Looking at these textured descriptions of social experience can show how the intersection between the development of work and social benefits was an intense site of

struggle and negotiation between Puerto Ricans. These stories allow me to take a look at individual life histories, rather than only at larger patterns, providing narratives of women's experiences. I use microhistories of these women's lives, culled from the case files and investigations into other government records, in order to capture an alternative narrative of the history of women, work, and welfare in Puerto Rican history.²⁹¹ I explore not only the production of these women as "clients" but also the small daily practices of resistance and negotiation to the imposition and regulation of the welfare state in the lives of working women. These are stories not easily captured in larger statistical data, but they are narratives that can be teased out of years of records about clients lives produced by social workers. Juana and María's are unique but typical in the terse and frustrated prose of social workers recounting heated exchanges, in angry letters directed at welfare officials by clients and their allies, and in the clipped phrases recounted in lists that document social workers interviews with neighbors that fact-checked clients own narratives. It is in these moments, fleeting crises and capitulations, all captured in a massive bureaucratic archive, that a more personal and intimate history of the impact of social welfare programs and social workers in the lives of clients can be traced.

The evidence that I consider highlights how women responded to the interventions into their lives made by social workers and other agents of the state, suggesting that women often spoke back about how their claims to benefits were being handled and about how information about them was recorded by social workers. In this

²⁹¹ For more on the use of microhistories in the Caribbean context see: Lara Putnam, "To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World" *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (2006): 615-630. Rebecca J. Scott, "Reclaiming Gregoria's Mule: The Meanings of Freedom in the Arimao and Caunao Valleys, Cienfuegos, Cuba, 1880-1899" *Past and Present* (2001): 181-216. Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Harvard University Press, 2012). In the context of Puerto Rico see: Sidney Mintz. *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

way, clients themselves tried to impact the way that evidence and knowledge about them was collected and organized. While these struggles often had limited impact, the small victories or negotiations that resulted form a pattern in the archive, one that suggests that the production of knowledge about these women was a more complicated process than a simple imposition by authorities. Rather, the politics, biases, and struggles for dignity of both social workers and clients is recorded in these case files. The struggle over benefits that resulted surfaces again and again in the archive and is one of main themes in the chapter.

Focusing on the lives of two applicants who became clients in the program, this chapter centers on a close reading of their case files to consider how they negotiated the contents of their benefits with social workers in the intimate and often invasive process of social casework. These cases illustrate how state programs regulated families, many of which were being transformed by migration. Every individual applying for benefits underwent this process in which the new roles of social worker and client were constructed and performed. The resulting case files reveal how social workers were charged with manifesting the abstract political ideologies of the state into concrete social policy that located individuals within gender, class, sexual and race categories. Placement into these categories had tangible material consequences for those seeking food, shelter, and care. Consequently, social work interviews were sites of struggle both among social workers and between social workers and clients over how benefits would be administered. Combined, the stories offer a microhistory that examines how clients were produced within the textual practices of casework. This microhistorical approach

provides a glimpse of how the formation of social welfare programs and the meaning of women's labor were negotiated in interactions between state officials and citizens.

1943: The PPD and the creation of the *Division de Bienestar Público*

While the creation of social welfare programs under the New Deal led to new modes of intervention in the lives of Puerto Rican communities, it also marked the transition to a new insular welfare system. The creation of this department was rooted in the rise of the PPD, a new populist party led by the enigmatic politician and writer, Luis Muñoz Marín.²⁹² Founded in 1938, the party was initially composed of a broad coalition of liberal and radical Puerto Ricans who wanted social change for the island. Many of its early supporters were professionals who had worked for New Deal programs, including many socialists and nationalists who desired social reform and social justice for Puerto Ricans of all backgrounds.²⁹³ The PPD grew from this base and developed effective populist machinery that aimed to politically mobilize rural communities by promising social changes, including the redistribution of land held by United States corporations to landless and displaced workers.²⁹⁴ The PPD also promised the development of a broad social safety net and the creation of welfare state programs that would provide social

²⁹² César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

²⁹³ Eileen Findlay, *We Are Left Without a Father Here: Masculinity, Domesticity, and Migration in Postwar Puerto Rico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

²⁹⁴ Ismael García-Colón, *Land Reform in Puerto Rico: Modernizing the Colonial State, 1941-1969* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).

services to all Puerto Ricans.²⁹⁵ Within this vision of the expanded social welfare programs, the social workers would continue to play central roles in the administration of government and the profession would expand. This populist politics and rhetoric garnered the party growing support among the Puerto Rican population. By 1940, party leader Muñoz Marín was named the leader of the insular senate and the PPD emerged victorious in consolidating political power.

However, as the party grew it also became increasingly conservative and moved away from embracing the possibility of the island's independence. Instead, the PPD explicitly promoted a reform strategy centered on a continued colonial relationship between the island and the United States.²⁹⁶ By 1942 the PPD began purging party members that supported the independence of the island from its ranks and moving toward increased restrictions on free speech that would be codified in law in subsequent years. Meanwhile, it continued to work to reform the island's colonial status without challenging it, a platform that would eventually lead to the island's first gubernatorial election in 1948 and the creation of a new commonwealth status (the *Estado Libre Asociado*) in 1952. The new vision of the state created under the PPD was aimed at modernizing the island and moving it towards an increasingly close relationship with the United States. Social workers played important roles within the state building projects of the new administration because they were architects and managers of the modernization and development programs that were central to this state project. However, not all of the social workers agreed with the party platform of the PPD, and some of the social workers

²⁹⁵ José Enrique Flores Ramos. "Mujer, familia y prostitución: La construcción del género bajo la hegemonía del Partido Popular Democrático, 1940-1968." Thesis (Ph. D.)--Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2002.

²⁹⁶ Ayala and Barnabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*.

were active in working towards alternative visions of Puerto Rico's future at the same time as they worked in state agencies. Most notably, despite restrictions on political freedom during the period, a number of important social workers supported socialism. The profession of social work continued to be a space where women organized politically for a variety of causes and advocated for social justice in local communities.

The rise of the PPD was also marked by a proliferation in the creation of new state institutions in Puerto Rico and a large-scale investment in the creation of social welfare programs and the expansion of the welfare state. The party openly supported the expansion of social services for the working-class and discourses about social justice and the rights of the Puerto Rican people to government benefits like health care, housing, and public assistance were a central part of this public discourse. The PPD position on social welfare likely garnered the party considerable support for its populist political platform, in particular because it party openly addressed women and families in need, claiming that the state would provide support for those that were struggling.²⁹⁷ It was under these conditions that on May 12, 1943 the insular government, led by Muñoz Marín, approved Public Law 95, which created the *Division de Bienestar Público* within the *Departamento de Sanidad*. Many social reformers and social workers in Puerto Rico heralded the creation of department as a turning point in which the insular government recognized its responsibility to the Puerto Ricans welfare.²⁹⁸ However, many social workers felt that the law didn't go far enough in providing resources to social welfare and they continued to push for a more expansive department of social welfare with greater

²⁹⁷ Eileen Findlay, *We are Left Without a Father Here*.

²⁹⁸ Nilsa Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras de la profesion de trabajo social*, 93-94.

autonomy and power.²⁹⁹ Although as it stood the programs created during this period expanded the function and role of social workers and the welfare state even further into Puerto Rican communities and neighborhoods.

The programs that were created included assistance for the elderly, children in need, and the blind as well as general assistance for other cases.³⁰⁰ The Division of Public Welfare was severely limited by the budget that it received, which didn't come anywhere near covering the demand for these services or the amounts that social workers believed that clients should receive. The first program that it created came to be known as the "\$7.50," referring to the largest funding amount that any individual or family could receive.³⁰¹ This meant that a family with multiple members whose needs far exceeded the amount could only receive a maximum payment of \$7.50 per month. In addition to these limits on funds, the division had nowhere near enough money to provide for even a fraction of the number of applicants who were deemed eligible under the guidelines created by the government. Social workers swamped with applications for relief were forced to create a rubric for sorting out those they considered the most deserving of relief, but they admitted openly that these metrics only existed out of total necessity and that there were large numbers of people that should be receiving assistance who had been left out of the program.³⁰²

²⁹⁹ For more on the law in general see: Luisa V. Iglesias, "Como se emplean los \$7.50," *Bienestar Público* 1, no.3, 1946, 10.

³⁰⁰ *Bienestar Público (Revista editada por la Division de Bienestar Público del Departamento de Sanidad)* Volume 1- Dec 1945 Number 1

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² *Bienestar Público (Revista editada por la Division de Bienestar Público del Departamento de Sanidad)* Volume 1- Dec 1945 Number 1

There were a number of other spaces that were opened up by the creation of the new Department of Social Welfare and in which social workers became directors of government programs. The agency was also in charge of managing a number of revamped and expanded institutions that housed increasing numbers of people as well as social workers continued role in managing milk station programs that provided free milk to the poor. Within the context of this broad range of programs social work was institutionalized in new ways. One of the other places that the social workers continued to play a central role was in the development of programs that targeted reproductive health. In particular, the role of social workers in creating maternal health and birth control programs during this period has been well documented. Through their participation in these programs, as in earlier moments, the social workers continued to develop what Laura Briggs has called a program of “Progressive Eugenics” that aimed to reduce the population through interventions in the lives of working women.³⁰³ This period marked a movement away from the community oriented social work that had occurred in the earlier period of social work development towards the administration of more formalized and extensive forms of casework by government agencies.

Social workers played a central role in agitating for the expansion of these benefits and the allocation of more funds for social services. While these welfare programs built on state infrastructure that had roots in New Deal programs and federal relief, they were directed by the insular government and represented a new manifestation of the political project of social reform pushed forward by the PPD. They were a part of a larger process of reworking the relationship between both the colonial state and society

³⁰³ Laura Briggs. *Reproducing Empire Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

and the broader political relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. However, there were also different visions of the Puerto Rican state within the context of the emergence of the PPD; social workers continued to work within state institutions while having divided ideas about the form that these programs should take. I consider how these case files reveal the production of an even more expansive bureaucratic structure that not only produced a new archive of knowledge about citizens but also transformed the relationship between state and society in Puerto Rico by bringing more and more social workers into the homes and intimate lives of Puerto Rican families and communities.

Juana Capó: From Guayama to San Juan

Juana Capó applied for old age assistance under the newly created public welfare laws in 1943. Juana's and her family's lives had been intimately shaped by her birth during the long transition from slavery to freedom in Puerto Rico. According to her baptismal certificate recorded in the registries of the Iglesia Parroquial San Antonio de Padua, Juana was born on February 8, 1868 in Guayama.³⁰⁴ This port city was the heart of the larger municipality of Guayama, one of the centers of the Puerto Rican sugar plantation economy at the time.³⁰⁵ In the mid-19th century this region had a population

³⁰⁴ AGPR Juana Capó.

³⁰⁵ The history of Guayama's role as an important plantation region in Puerto Rico has been documented in histories of slavery and emancipation. See for instance, Luis Figueroa, *Sugar Slavery, and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Jalil Sued Badillo, *Guayama, notas para su historia* (San Juan: Oficina de Asuntos Culturales de La Fortaleza, 1983), Francisco A. Scarano, *Sugar and Slavery in Puerto Rico: The Plantation Economy of Ponce, 1800-1850* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), Mariano Negrón-Portillo and Raúl Mayo Santana, *La esclavitud menor: la esclavitud en los municipios del interior de Puerto Rico en el siglo XIX*

with one of the highest percentages of African and African-descent slaves in Puerto Rico.³⁰⁶ Her baptismal certificate states her original name as “Juana de Mata,” child of Ursula, the slave of Don Florencio Capó. No father’s name was listed; instead the document offers the name of her grandmother, María Monserrate, as well as her godparents.³⁰⁷ María Monseratte was born on the Africa continent around 1813 and her dominant language was French; her presence in Puerto Rico may have been linked to the revolutionary upheavals in the Caribbean, most notably the rippling impacts of the Haitian Revolution, which had displaced French speaking colonists and slaves during the period.³⁰⁸ Puerto Rico became a destination for migration after the enactment of the *Cédula de Gracias* in 1815, a royal decree with the purpose of economically stimulating Puerto Rico through the immigration of aspiring agriculturists and their slaves.³⁰⁹ Restrictions on the Atlantic slave trade also served to fuel the contraband slave trade in Guayama, whose rivers and harbors had long been the site of illegal commerce, swelling the population with smuggled slaves brought from other Caribbean islands and directly

: *estudio del registro de esclavos de 1872, segunda parte* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras, 2007).

³⁰⁶ Historian Luis Figueroa notes that, “Guayama, for example, had a total 1842 population of 10,391 inhabitants, of whom 4,286 (41.2 percent) were slaves, an amazing and perhaps unparalleled figure in nineteenth century Puerto Rico.” Figueroa, *Sugar and Slavery in Puerto Rico* 53.

³⁰⁷ AGPR Juana Capó.

³⁰⁸ The largest group of foreign-born residents of Guayama were listed as “French,” and this group included migrants from Saint Domingue or Martinique who established themselves at every level of Puerto Rican society, as planters and as artisans. Additionally, slave ships carrying slaves from these areas were often confiscated off the shore of Guayama. See: Badillo, *Guayama*, 87-88.

³⁰⁹ For discussions of migration and illegal slave trade into Puerto Rico see: Joseph C. Dorsey, *Slave Traffic in the Age of Abolition: Puerto Rico, West Africa, and the Non-Hispanic Caribbean, 1815-1859*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), Jorge Luis Chinae, *Race and Labor in the Hispanic Caribbean: The West Indian Immigrant Worker Experience in Puerto Rico, 1800-1850* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

from Africa.³¹⁰ Monseratte likely arrived via one of these currents and was bought or inherited by Florencio Capó Planchard by the 1850s.³¹¹

The *Cédula de Gracias*'s sponsorship of royalist refugees from the wars of independence in South America had also propelled the immigration of the Capó family from Caracas, Venezuela. In the 1850's Florencio Capó Planchard married into the powerful Vazquez family that had settled in the Guayama region in the 18th century, taking over the Hacienda Olimpo, a sugar plantation located on the Guamani river about 1.5 Kilometers outside of town. Like the majority of slaves at the Hacienda Olimpo, Monseratte worked as an agricultural laborer in the fields of this sugar plantation.³¹² She witnessed the boom of the Puerto Rican sugar industry and its contraction after a fall in sugar prices in the 1840s.³¹³ Her daily life was structured by her work in and outside the cane fields. She had a child in her thirties, Ursula, with another African born slave that spoke French.³¹⁴ She raised her daughter alongside her doing agricultural work.³¹⁵ When Ursula was a twenty years old woman she herself had a child, Juana de Mata, with a white hacienda owner. Like many of the documents from this period of slavery in

³¹⁰ Dorsey, *Slave Traffic in the Age of Abolition*.

³¹¹ *ibid*.

³¹² About half of female slaves in the plantation region worked as agricultural workers whereas on smaller farms there was a higher rate of women working in domestic service. Negrón-Portillo and Santana, *La esclavitud menor*.

³¹³ Scarano, *Sugar and Slavery in Puerto Rico*. Figueroa, *Sugar Slavery and Freedom*.

³¹⁴ 1910 United States Census, Juana Capó.

³¹⁵ Negrón-Portillo and Santana, *La esclavitud menor*.

Guayama the names of the fathers of slaves was not listed,³¹⁶ but in later documents her fathers name was recorded as Felix Capó.³¹⁷

Around the time of Juana's birth in 1866, there were 32 slaves working at the Hacienda Olimpo, which produced fifty tons of sugar that year.³¹⁸ Florencio Capó ran the plantation with the help of his son Juan Ignacio Capó. During this period the two were actively involved in managing the end of slavery to their greatest advantage. The Spanish Cortes first passed the Ley Moret in 1870 that freed slaves over sixty and babies born after September 17th, 1868, and then it passed the Abolition Law of 1873 that mandated the freeing of all slaves after a three-year period of forced contract labor. On April 23, 1873 the *Reglamento para la Contratacion de Servicio de los Libertos* outlined that these labor contracts would be regulated by a *protector de libertos* or a *síndico protector de libertos* who represented him at the municipal level.³¹⁹ In Guayama, Juan Ignacio Capó was named *síndico*.³²⁰

The process of abolition relied upon the bureaucratic process of collecting data on slave ownership. One of the first ways that planters resisted abolition was by falsifying the birth dates and ages of slaves, a common practice. It is plausible that this occurred specifically in the cases of Monserrate and Juana de Mata, because the baby's birth was

³¹⁶ Negrón-Portillo and Santana, *La esclavitud menor*.

³¹⁷ It is unclear if this was an erroneous recording of the name Florencio Capó, or his brother Francisco Capó, or if her father was another Capó named Felix. This listing of the name of Juana's father comes much later by a few different social workers that worked on her case in the 1940s in San Juan. These women did not know the Capó family, so it's possible that in a rush to complete the documents they did not record the correct name. However, it is also possible that there was a Felix Capó.

³¹⁸ Figueroa, *Sugar, Slavery & Freedom*.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

listed just six months before the cut off date and her grandmothers age was listed as 58 in 1871, also just under the age necessary to be freed.³²¹ A 1871 census of Guayama Residents lists Monserrate as 58, Ursula as 23, and Juana as 2 years old. All were listed as slaves in the *negro* section of the census, which was organized by three racial categories: *blanco*, *mulatto*, and *negro*.³²² Shortly after this census Florencio Capó decided to manumit Monseratte whose *carta de libertad* states the reason for her manumission as her good service to her master.³²³ However, the reason for the manumission may have been less benevolent, considering that the documents goes on to state that her hands were disfigured from years of work, suggesting that she was no longer as valuable as a laborer.³²⁴ In 1872, Florencio Capó registered both Ursula and Juana in the Puerto Rican wide *Registro de Esclavos*. In this same registry, he listed Ursula as a field worker and Juana as a child of three years and ten months.³²⁵

³²¹ This practice was particularly common with slaves that were born in Africa, whose exact birth dates might not have been recorded. Negrón-Portillo and Santana, *La esclavitud menor*, Figueroa, *Sugar, Slavery & Freedom*.

³²² AGPR, Municipal, Guayama, Actos Municipales y Documentos Municipales, Censo de Almas de Guayama, 1871. Caja especial.

³²³ I found reference to this manumission document in Luis Figueroa's *Sugar, Slavery and Freedom*, and was able to locate it for further reference. AGRP, Protocolos Notariales de Guayama, Carta de Libertad.

³²⁴ Luis Figueroa has pointed out that this manumission was one of only 99 in the entire region of Guayama during the 1868-1872 period, which represented only 5.7 percent of the slave population, and that Florencio Capó and Juan Ignacio Capó manumitted five slaves each. Figueroa, *Sugar, Slavery & Freedom*, 87.

³²⁵ AGPR, Registro Central de Esclavos de 1872. These registration documents were first analyzed in, Benjamin Nistal- Moret "Problems of the social structure of slavery in Puerto Rico during the process of abolition," in, Manuel Moreno Fraginals, Frank Moya Pons, and Stanley L. Engerman, *Between Slavery and Free Labor: The Spanish-Speaking Caribbean in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985). They were then the subject of three volumes of more recent interrogation, Mariano Negrón Portillo and Raúl Mayo Santana, *La esclavitud urbana en San Juan de Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras, PR: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales, University of Puerto Rico, 1992). Raúl Mayo Santana, Mariano Negrón Portillo, and Manuel Mayo López. *Cadenas de esclavitud y de solidaridad: esclavos y libertos en San Juan, siglo XIX* (San Juan, P.R.: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad of Puerto Rico, 1997).

The 1873-1876 period and the drawing up of labor contracts between *libertos* and managers, many of whom were their former owners, would shape the transition to free labor.³²⁶ It is likely that Ursula worked for the Capós as a contract worker before she, like many other former slaves, moved from plantations on the outskirts of Guayama.³²⁷ The general movement of workers into neighborhoods outside of the downtown area was accompanied by the transition of freed slaves into wageworkers. The end of the contract system and the rise of wage work in Puerto Rico led to freed agricultural workers being divided along through the gendering of labor roles.³²⁸ In Guayama many men became wageworkers on plantations, while some who had been contracted to artisans were given apprenticeships and entered new trades like carpentry, shoemaking, and printing. Former female slaves who had been agricultural workers were left with opportunities outside the fields doing domestic or caretaking work in the service sector such as laundry, ironing, cooking, cleaning, sewing, and childcare. These women joined the ranks of other free and enslaved women who had toiled in domestic service jobs before emancipation.³²⁹ This transition greatly impacted Ursula, who moved into town, leaving behind her work in the

³²⁶ AGPR, Libro de Contratos de Libertos de San Juan de 1873-1876. I have not been able to find Ursula in this book of contracts, and Juana would have been too young to be registered in it. However, many contracts were also made informally so it's possible this record does not exist. I draw from the interesting account of the gendered implications of these contracts in recent scholarship: Ileana Rodríguez-Silva, "Libertos and libertas in the construction of the free worker in postemancipation Puerto Rico," in Pamela Scully and Diana Paton, *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005).

³²⁷ Figueroa, *Sugar, Slavery & Freedom*.

³²⁸ Rodríguez-Silva, "Libertos and libertas."

³²⁹ For a history of some of these women see, Félix V Matos Rodríguez, *Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1820-1868* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999).

cane for a life as a domestic worker.³³⁰ Like many slaves in Guayama, she took the name of her owner with her, and from here on she and Juana became Capós.³³¹

The Guayama barrios into which these migrants moved expanded into bustling communities made up largely of individuals of African descent. Within these neighborhoods some workers achieved increasing social mobility through participating in the expanding artisan class, which led to a cultural and intellectual blossoming in Guayama.³³² Ursula would help Juana to join this group by encouraging her to learn to read and write, and helping her to become a seamstress. Juana became skilled at sewing and embroidering. She mastered a variety of different styles, and employers throughout town sought after her intricate work. In 1922, when she was 22 years old she married the 33 year old carpenter Manuel M. Garcia, who went by the name Modesto. He specialized in the construction of houses and other buildings around the municipality, a trade that made him a part of the expanding artisan class.³³³ The two young entrepreneurs would likely have been relatively financially secure due to their youth and training in skilled occupations that were high in demand. They were able to support Ursula, who helped them with the upkeep of their home, and who lived with her daughter her entire life. The three of them would have witnessed the transition from Spanish to United States colonial rule in 1898, likely seeing the US troops set up camp in the downtown of Guayama.

³³⁰ AGPR, Juana Capó.

³³¹ Figueroa, *Sugar, Slavery and Freedom*.

³³² Luis Felipe Dessus, *El Album de Guayama* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Tip. Cantero Fernandez y Co.; 1918), Roberto Ramos-Perea, *Literatura puertorriqueña negra del siglo XIX escrita por negros* (San Juan de P.R.: Ateneo Puertorriqueño, Editorial Lea, 2009).

³³³ 1910 United States Census Records, Juana Capó.

The United States census of 1910 contains a record of Juana's household in which she is listed as 40 years old, living with Modesto, age 50, and her mother Ursula, age 60. In this census report Juana is listed as *blanca* while her mother and husband are listed as *mulatto*. She was placed in a variety of different racial categories as these labels shifted. Shortly after her birth she was listed in the *negra* section of census records, however, even an early record from 1872 suggests some ambiguity. The census taker writes that her phenotypical assessment (of mouth, nose, eyes, and such) cannot be appropriately taken because she is still growing. She is listed, however, with her mother as *negra*, not placed in the *mulatto* or *blanco* sections of the census. There were a number of slaves listed in the *blanco* section of these censuses, so this option would have been available at the time. In 1910 she was *blanca*, but that would quickly change; the United States Census of 1920 lists her as *mulatta*. Some documents from the 1940s and 50s categorized her as *negra*. Others provide more complicated phenotypical narratives, including one that states she had very light skin and *pelo rizado* (very curly hair). The 1910 census is the only place she is identified as white during her life, which may have from the particular perception or goals of the census and census taker. This year of the census recorded the origins of Ursula incorrectly, stating that her parents were born in Puerto Rico, while earlier and later documents all state they were African born. If the census takers racial categorization in this moment did not include the fact that Ursula was of direct African descent, his calculation may have resulted from other social constructions that might have included the lightness of her skin, or her relative economic security as a successful business woman in the community. Additionally, her literacy may also have socially marked her as *blanca*. However, it is impossible to know exactly the

reason this classification occurred, was it a “mistake” or had Juana been made *blanca* by her social and economic situation?

By 1920 Juana was a *mulatta* again on the census and the Jones Act of 1917 had made her a United States citizen, although she would not have full voting rights until 1929 when suffrage was extended to Puerto Rican women. Her life was very different by the start of the 1920’s because her husband, Modesto, had passed away. However, she still had the companionship of her elderly mother and a younger cousin, Felicia Vazquez. The women continued to work as seamstresses, Juana doing piecework in the home and Felicia working outside the home in a factory. In this way the three participated in the boom of the needle-working industry in Puerto Rico, an economic development during which women of all backgrounds entered into waged labor in large numbers.³³⁴ Juana and her family grew to depend on this industry and when it began to collapse in the 1920s, and the Great Depression worsened the Puerto Rican economy it became an increasingly difficult time for them and many other Puerto Ricans. The resulting economic crisis propelled migration in the 1930s towards capital city of San Juan and to the United States.³³⁵ After Ursula passed away, Juana, who was already nearly 60 years old, joined this movement and struck out for the urban metropolis of San Juan in search of work. The long journey from slavery to freedom in Puerto Rico had shaped the labor experiences of three generations of her family, spurring multiple migrations, and leading her to move

³³⁴ María del Carmen Baerga. *Género y trabajo: la industria de la aguja en Puerto Rico y el Caribe hispanico* (San Juan, P.R.: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1993).

³³⁵ Carmen Teresa Whalen. *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

from the plantation region where she had grown up towards a new bustling urban space in search of new opportunities.

María: From Camuy to San Juan

María was born in 1920 in the *barrio* of Cienegas in the northwestern coastal town of Camuy, Puerto Rico.³³⁶ She was listed in all of the documents in her life as *blanca*, a woman described as white who may have traced some of her ancestry to the Canary Islands like many of the individuals living in Camuy at the time.³³⁷ However, no specifics of her ancestors' backgrounds are included in the case file. Cienegas, the neighborhood of her birth, had been the site of a mix of various types of agricultural production and was known around the island as a center of political dissidence against the Spanish crown in the late 19th Century.³³⁸ However, United States intervention and corporate expansion into Camuy would lead to rapid changes in the 1910s and 1920s. The town became a commercial hub because of its location at the end of the railroad line as it expanded westward from San Juan.³³⁹ Transportation possibilities helped United States and Puerto Rican based corporations to further develop large scale sugar enterprises like the *Central Alianza*, *Central Soller*, and *Central Riollano* in the Camuy

³³⁶ AGPR, María.

³³⁷ Estela Cifre de Loubriel, *La formación del pueblo puertorriqueño: la contribución de los isleño-canarios* (San Juan, P.R.: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, 1995).

³³⁸ Certain foundational members of the independence and antislavery groups that were involved in the *Grito de Lares* uprising in Puerto Rico were from this neighborhood. Olga Jiménez de Wagenheim, *Puerto Rico's Revolt for Independence: El Grito De Lares* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985).

³³⁹ José A. Sierra Martínez, *Camuy: notas para su historia* (San Juan P.R.: Comité Historia de los Pueblos, 1984.)

region. María lived with her maternal grandparents and her mother and her mothers' sister in Camuy during the 1920 and the early 30s. Her grandfather worked as a sugar cane cutter for one of these expanding businesses. Industrial expansion in this period also fueled the needle-working industry, particularly in Camuy³⁴⁰ María's mother and her mother's sister both worked as home needle-workers in this period and the women in her family had a small independent workshop within their home in which they did piecework. This type of homework expanded in Camuy at the same time as factories also employed women and girls in needlework.

In later documentation María would discuss how the women in her family did not just work as needle workers. She chronicled how her mother also worked washing, ironing, and doing other domestic tasks in the barrio of Cienegas for wages. These women negotiated their needle-work as a part of larger strategies of paid and unpaid labor in order to survive during the 1920s and 1930s.³⁴¹ María's mother considered her main occupation to be that of a *lavandera* (washerwomen) and this is what her daughter would refer to her as later in life.³⁴² The fact that the family pieced together their livelihood from a variety of economic tasks made sense because of the economically uncertain times. In thinking about Puerto Rican women's labor during this period it is important to consider how women may have moved quickly in and out of different types of economic activity and that although domestic work was often labor histories of the mid 20th century, women like Juana and María used this strategy to supplement income during the

³⁴⁰ María del Carmen Baerga, *Género y trabajo: la industria de la aguja en Puerto Rico y el Caribe hispánico* (San Juan, P.R.: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1993).

³⁴¹ Carmen Teresa Whalen. *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

³⁴² AGPR, María.

transition to a more industrialized Puerto Rico.³⁴³ María's family washed and sewed in Camuy at the same time as Juana Capó's family participated in the same patterns of labor negotiation in Guayama. María's story also show that while domestic work and laundering clothes were jobs often done by women of African descent,³⁴⁴ this was not always the case, as rural migrants considered *blanca* sought out these jobs as well

When she was still very young, María's father and mother both passed away, leaving her an orphan. In the 1930s the social situation of the family, made up of agricultural workers and needle-workers had already become unstable as United States textile companies withdrew from Puerto Rico and modernization in the sugar industry led to increased labor exploitation on the sugar *colonos*. With the death of her parents and her maternal grandparents growing old, María was forced to leave behind her education after the fourth grade. She may have worked for a short time in needle-working, like many young girls who worked alongside their family members. As these jobs ended she transitioned into working full time as a domestic worker in order to support herself.

María moved in with other families in her community and provided domestic labor in exchange for shelter and spending money. She told social workers later in her life that she had been working as a domestic for as long as she could remember. Her experience mirrors that of many other applicants for domestic work during the 1940s and 1950s who worked in domestic service when they were young.³⁴⁵ Many of these files contain information about these youths between 10 and 18 being *alquiladas* (rented

³⁴³ For a discussion of some of these labor strategies see: Carmen Teresa Whalen. *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*.

³⁴⁴ Elizabeth Crespo, "Domestic Work and Racial Divisions in Women's Employment in Puerto Rico, 1899-1930." *Centro Journal* 8.1-2 (1996): 30-41.

³⁴⁵ Archivo General, Departamento de Bienestar Público

“girl”) or *muchachas* (“girls”). These poor young girls and women would live and work for families other than their own.³⁴⁶ Often the families that took these young women in were not of a significantly higher economic status than the families they left behind. This distribution of young women into the families of other people in their communities has not yet been studied in the Puerto Rican context, but these files hint at an intricate web of caretaking work that was performed by young girls in Puerto Rican migrant communities in this period. This labor practice was also sustained through migration patterns, as other case files of the time show that many of these individuals were sent away from rural areas to work in the San Juan region. Moreover, many were also sent to work in the United States, with some of these youths returning to the island and others remaining on the mainland.

María’s early life was shaped by her experience as a live in domestic worker like many other young women of her generation. The larger migratory currents that had swept Juana towards San Juan in the 1930s also pulled María towards the metropolis in search of better work opportunities. She left behind Camuy and headed to the growing city in which demand for service and domestic worker increased daily.³⁴⁷ It was during this period that she met Rafael, a young man that would capture her heart and with whom she would have three children by the time she turned 25 years old. The couple would work to establish themselves in their new urban home in the 1930s.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶ This phenomena of child domestic labor has been studied in other Latin American contexts, see the edited volume: Elsa Chaney, Mary Garcia Castro and Margo L. Smith, *Muchachas No More: Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

³⁴⁷ María del Carmen Baerga. *Género y trabajo: la industria de la aguja en Puerto Rico y el Caribe hispánico* (San Juan, P.R.: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1993).

³⁴⁸ I have also changed the name of María’s husband.

Juana Capó: Life in Santurce

In the 1930s Juana Capó also joined the migration to the capital, she had left the town of Guayama and ended up in the urban neighborhood of Santurce. The apartments here were crowded with migrants and the area was surrounded by *arrabales* (shantytowns) hastily built squatter settlements.³⁴⁹ In Santurce, Juana maintained ties to Guayama and worked and lived alongside people from her hometown. She continued to do piecework and mend clothes, developing a network of employers of diverse racial and social status backgrounds. While she did work for some wealthy white professional families, she also worked for an expanding middle class made up of individuals labeled as *mulatto* or *negro* in their census records.³⁵⁰ This research suggest that there was a much more complex network of domestic work that existed between people of color of various economic statues in San Juan society.³⁵¹ During her first years in San Juan, Juana lived with a white man named Diego Muniz and his wife Luisa Sterling de Muniz, who was listed as a woman “of color” on the census. The couple had three young children and lived off Diego’s twenty-five dollar a month salary as an electrician. It is likely that Juana helped Luisa with caring for her children and paid rent to the couple while developing a

³⁴⁹ The movement between dwellers in the Barrio Obrero of Santurce and the shantytowns around this area was documented by United States based sociologists, urban planners, and anthropologists in the 1960s. For example, Helen Icken Safa, *The Urban Poor of Puerto Rico: a Study in Development and Inequality* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974).

³⁵⁰ From my exploration of the census records of various of her employers from the 1930 census, I have been able to establish that she worked for a variety of different types of households, which included families with different racial identifiers and some families with servants living in, and other families that appear to be of working class origins.

³⁵¹ The literature on domestic work is still limited. See: Felix V. Matos Rodríguez, *Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1820-1868* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999).

network of clients for her seamstress work. Juana was robbed of her savings which she planned to use to buy an apartment. The money was stolen from the office of the lawyer that Luisa had recommended. After the theft, Luisa tried to make amends by giving her at least a dollar a month to perform domestic tasks.

After living with Luisa, Juana moved into the Santurce home of a professional couple of African descent, Enrique Lefebre Modesto and Catalina Baez Lefebre. Enrique Lefebre, a lawyer and poet, was one of the great intellectuals of his time. Born in 1880 in Guayama, he began his intellectual development amidst the growing artisan world of the city.³⁵² Juana knew Enrique from their shared time in Guayama. In 1918, he published a well-received volume of literary criticism and social commentary called *Paisajes Mentales*.³⁵³ One of the essays in this collection is dedicated to *Juanita Capó*; in Juana's correspondence she signed her letters with the name Juanita. The story is romantic and nostalgic, describing his experience of being back in the artistic community of Guayama as a young man. Juana Capó also lived with Catalina Baez after Enrique passed away in 1943. Catalina was a teacher in a public school, and while little has been written on female teachers of African descent in Puerto Rico, some women were taught in homes and small schools in urban areas.³⁵⁴ Additionally, within the writings of African descent

³⁵² Enrique Lefebre had participated particularly in theatre and poetry salons with other intellectual thinkers in Guayama, and by 1901 he edited a modernist poetry journal called *Claro de Luna*. He moved to San Juan and was worked as a tailor before becoming a lawyer in 1912. He also toured Europe in the 1920s giving lectures on literature. See: Roberto Ramos-Perea, *Literatura puertorriqueña negra del siglo XIX escrita por negros* (San Juan de P.R.: Ateneo Puertorriqueño, Editorial Lea, 2009).

³⁵³ Enrique Lefebre, *Paisajes mentales* (San Juan, P.R.: Tip. Cantero, Fernández & Co, 1918).

³⁵⁴ Zulmarie Alverio Ramos, *En búsqueda de la maestra Celestina Cordero Molina dentro de la memoria social de Puerto Rico* (Thesis (M.E.) Universidad de Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, 2005). This thesis discusses the role of a free black woman, sister of the famous black teacher Rafael Cordero, who ran a school for girls in San Juan in the period around 1810-1860.

Puerto Rican intellectuals, there were debates on the merits of educating women, with many supporting the education of women.³⁵⁵

Catalina became a professional during a period when women swept into waged employment and when opportunities for professionalization grew. New Deal and liberal reforms resulted in educational training programs that placed women in gendered occupations in and outside the home. Vocational programs in home economics and housekeeping were created at the same time as professional education and certifications in teaching, nursing and social work expanded. The development of the professional discipline of social work and the expanding reach of the social welfare state would intimately impact Catalina and Juana's lives. This process began with the implementation of social reforms meant to control the rapidly growing urban population of Santurce and its surrounding *arrabales*. Social workers were involved in administering these housing projects and giving monetary assistance to the poor, elderly and homeless. The government built housing projects and developments around San Juan and initiated a massive "slum clearance" project.³⁵⁶ In the early years, admission to these developments was highly competitive. When one of Catalina's children received a coveted placement, she left her Santurce apartment and moved into the Caserio San Jose, leaving Juana without a place to live.

The development of monetary public assistance programs had also resulted from the extension of these reforms and the implementation of the Social Security Act in the

³⁵⁵ As early as 1871, Guayama playwright Eleuterio Derkes went as far as saying that educating women was necessary in creating good citizens, and that the success of the United States were the result of educating and respecting women." Ramos-Perea, *Literatura puertorriqueña negra*, 209.

³⁵⁶ Kurt W. Back, *Slums, Projects, and People; Social Psychological Problems of Relocation in Puerto Rico* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1962).

late 1930s, with full coverage the mid 1940s.³⁵⁷ Juana applied during the time when these types of social services were first being made available. These programs took expanded the programs of earlier charitable institutions created under liberal Spanish and United States reforms.³⁵⁸ Public Welfare offices sprang up around the island and numerous social workers were trained in education programs in Puerto Rico and the US to meet the demand for these services.³⁵⁹ This development was part of the expansion of the social welfare state that has been well documented in the United States context and is a recent site of investigation in the Latin American context.³⁶⁰ These developments were linked to a growing professional class of women who were a part of a larger emerging middle class. Social workers played an important role in administering social welfare policy and actively building the welfare state in Puerto Rico.³⁶¹

When Juana applied for old age assistance at the Department of Public Welfare's offices in 1943, her first social worker required that she authorize a full background check, and provide character witnesses to support her statements. She chose as a reference her friend Luisa, who was later interviewed in the office. The case file that

³⁵⁷ Manuel R. Rodríguez, *A New Deal for the Tropics: Puerto Rico During the Depression Era, 1932-1935* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011).

³⁵⁸ For a history of charitable institutions under Spanish rule see, Teresita Martínez Vergne, *Shaping the Discourse on Space: Charity and Its Wards in Nineteenth-Century San Juan, Puerto Rico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

³⁵⁹ Nilsa M. Burgos, *Pioneras de la profesión de trabajo social en Puerto Rico* (Hato Rey, P.R.: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 1997).

³⁶⁰ Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy From Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston: South End Press, 1996). Linda Gordon, *Women, the State, and Welfare* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990). Linda Gordon, *Pitied but not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). Donna J. Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). Ann Shelby Blum, *Domestic Economies: Family, Work, and Welfare in Mexico City, 1884-1943* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

³⁶¹ Burgos Ortiz, *Pioneras*.

resulted from this application for benefits provides a fifteen-year account of Juana's economic status as reported by over a dozen social workers. There were regular annual updates as well as additional updates if the "status" of Juana's case changed. When Juana first applied in 1943 she claimed that she was not feeling well. Her eyesight was bad because of cataracts and she was having problems with her knees. She told social workers that this had resulted in her income dropping from ten to three dollars a month and that she had no assets or family support. The social worker's notes document how the Department of Social Welfare calculated Juana's expenses and how much she was already making as a seamstress. They contacted some of Juana's employers to check her account. She was originally awarded \$7.50 a month after her initial application in 1943, the maximum payment available. Through being awarded these funds Juana began a new relationship with the state that would continue throughout the last fifteen years of her life.

María: La Perla

After María arrived in San Juan with her partner Rafael, the couple sought employment in two expanding sectors of the metropolitan economy. Rafael was hired as a dockworker in the San Juan docks and worked unloading the cargo of incoming ships to the port. María began working in general domestic service but soon was able to find a job as a waitress in a few different restaurants in the San Juan area. Her job as a waitress provided her with better economic security and wages and she was proud of having this position for a number of years when she was most financially established in the city. There is little literature on the experiences of women who were working as domestics or

in the service industry in San Juan during this period; most labor history has focused on the experiences of factory workers.³⁶² María's experiences melding domestic work with that of waged work in the service sector shows how a certain type of experience would be left out of this net. María lived and worked in the neighborhood of *La Perla* a working-class neighborhood located on the edge of the urban center of San Juan, between the walls of old colonial city and the sea. The neighborhood was an important space in the city because it was home to many of the workers that were employed in the service economy. These workers included many women like María who worked as domestics, laundresses, servants, cooks, waitresses, and seamstresses.

La Perla was also the site of numerous campaigns by social reformers over the generations to reform and intervene in the lives of poor workers and their families. As social welfare programs and public health programs were developed under the PPD, reforms of the early 1940s *La Perla* was one of the areas where social workers began developing new public assistance programs. During the same period the neighborhood also was regularly described as a slum in popular literature and by government agencies and was evoked in popular discourse as a space in need of reform and regulation. The PPD also targeted the neighborhood as one of areas targeted by government sponsored "slum clearance" projects aimed at the relocating the urban poor to outside of the city's walls. In the context of the PPD reform project, these "slum clearance" projects were particularly directed at moving poor workers into newly developed state sponsored public housing projects. Puerto Rican workers living in the neighborhood often resisted these

³⁶² This is not just the case in Puerto Rico, but also in the larger literature on Latin American Women's Work. See John D. French and Daniel James, *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers: From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997).

types of interventions into their lives, in some cases refusing to be relocated to housing projects.³⁶³ At the same time *La Perla* also became the site of numerous social scientific studies of poverty conducted by both Puerto Rican and United States researchers. Oftentimes these studies were conducted in collaboration with social workers that had already been working in the area in social welfare programs, relocation projects, or public health clinics.³⁶⁴ The social workers who traveled into *La Perla* during these years were not just working with clients to get benefits; there was also a larger project underway to collect information about the poverty in the neighborhood. From the very beginning the collection of data in the case files was seen as providing a new source of data that could be used to produce knowledge about poor families and that could be studied and analyzed. Puerto Rican social workers became important intermediaries through this work between clients and government sponsored reform projects.

Between the 1940s and 1970s a number of studies that focused on María's neighborhood and other poor Puerto Rican neighborhoods. The most well known of these studies was Oscar Lewis's sociological investigation *La Vida: A Puerto Family in the Culture of Poverty- Puerto Rico and New York* published in 1966.³⁶⁵ In the book Lewis changed the name of the "slum" from *La Perla* to the fictional name of *La Esmeralda*. Lewis focused on the life history of a Puerto Rican matriarch, who worked as a prostitute in this area, on two of her children also living on the island, and on two other children

³⁶³ Marygrace Tyrrell, "Colonizing citizens: Housing Puerto Ricans, 1917--1952." Diss. Northwestern University, 2009)

³⁶⁴ Susan M. Rigdon. *The Culture Facade: Art, Science, and Politics in the Work of Oscar Lewis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

³⁶⁵ Oscar Lewis, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty--San Juan and New York* (New York: Random House, 1966). Oscar Lewis, *A Study of Slum Culture: Backgrounds for La Vida* (New York: Random House, 1968).

who had migrated to New York. In this work Lewis developed the concept of the “culture of poverty,” a concept that attributed social problems on the island to sexually promiscuous Puerto Rican women who reproduced poverty through their illicit behavior.³⁶⁶ Oscar Lewis’s vision of *La Perla* as a seedy slum was counteracted by the 1974 anthropological study *The Urban Poor of Puerto Rico: A Study of Development and Inequality* published by Helen Safa.³⁶⁷ In this work, Safa focused on a different area, *El Fanguito*, a neighborhood adjacent to Santurce. She used this study to make the point that urban poverty in San Juan had been the result of structural inequalities resulting from capitalist economic growth in San Juan, demonstrating that the destruction of these neighborhoods and the relocations of these residents to housing projects had resulted in increasing economic and social marginalization of the Puerto Rican working poor. However, this study maintained an outsider’s perspective and focused on structural concerns and categorizing behavior, often leaving more questions about how Puerto Ricans themselves had navigated these social changes or impacted their creation.³⁶⁸

What is interesting about both of these studies by United States-based social science researchers is their often unacknowledged reliance on Puerto Rican social workers to initiate contacts with research subjects and to perform data collection. Social workers like Munita Muñoz Lee, the daughter of Puerto Rican Governor Luis Muñoz Marín, provided Oscar Lewis with contacts and research assistance in order to conduct

³⁶⁶ Laura Briggs, “La Vida, Moynihan, and Other Libels: Social Science, Migration, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Welfare Queen” *Centro Journal* 14 (1): 3-24, 2002.

³⁶⁷ Helen Icken Safa, *The Urban Poor of Puerto Rico: a Study in Development and Inequality* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974).

³⁶⁸ For more on Helen Safa and her work in Puerto Rico see: Jorge Duany. "Anthropology in a Postcolonial Colony: Helen I. Safa's Contribution to Puerto Rican Ethnography." *Caribbean Studies* 38, no. 2 (2010): 33-57.

his research in Puerto Rico.³⁶⁹ Oscar Lewis maintained close contact with these social workers and was known to criticize their research in the field.³⁷⁰ Social workers were also active agents in the development of housing projects and their administration and there were social workers assigned to work in offices established in each new housing development. Helen Safa's team was aided by its proximity to social science projects of the Urban Renewal and Housing Administration of Puerto Rico.³⁷¹ The intimate role of social welfare officials in the lives of Puerto Ricans in these communities was hinted at but not fully interrogated in these studies, despite the fact that social life and opportunities were being increasingly shaped by interactions between Puerto Rican social workers and their new clients, the working poor. Looking at the life experience of María and Juana shows how these social work practices and developments impacted Puerto Rican lives.

While María was working as a waitress in San Juan between 1938-1943 she became ill with tuberculosis that spread around the urban area and particularly infected poor workers living in dilapidated housing conditions. She switched back from working in restaurants to washing and ironing clothes, labor she continued from 1943-1945. This type of work provided a stopgap measure in between other types of employment for many women who became ill with diseases like tuberculosis. However, this work was not well paid; she received less than nine dollars a month on average, nearly half the amount she reported making as a waitress. Other case files show that the employment patterns of

³⁶⁹ Susan M. Rigdon, *The Culture Facade: Art, Science, and Politics in the Work of Oscar Lewis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

³⁷⁰ José Luís Méndez, *Las ciencias sociales y el proceso político puertorriqueño* (San Juan, P.R.: Ediciones Puerto, 2005).

³⁷¹ Helen Icken Safa, *The Urban Poor of Puerto Rico: A Study in Development and Inequality* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974).

individuals who were ill or disabled often included performance of domestic work tasks to provide subsistence wages. These workers, like Juana herself, would work and live in the homes of people in the community who had either more resources or space for boarders. Many others who had children, like María, maintained independent apartments while taking in different types of domestic tasks to perform in their homes or outside of them. These workers were given the lowest wages within the Puerto Rican economy and were left out of the majority of labor policy discourse in Puerto Rico, which centered on political idea of able-bodied nuclear families with male heads of household.

As her health conditions worsened in the early 1940s, María sought medical attention at one of the numerous the Department of Public Health clinics that had been set up in the metropolitan area. Social workers were particularly concerned with trying to reduce the number of new tuberculosis cases in cooperation with public health officials. Some of these individuals were admitted to sanatoriums where they were treated; however, there were limited spots in health programs and many received only partial treatment. The clinic that María went was the *Unidad de Salud Público* in the neighborhood of Santurce, the same location where Juana Capó had received treatment for problems with her knee.

The public health clinics also served another well documented purpose during the same period, they opened up a new space for the state to regulate the bodies and lives of the Puerto Rican poor in ways that served eugenicist goals.³⁷² Public health was a main

³⁷² For a study of the way that public health worked in Puerto Rico- and particularly the way in which these health projects often were the sites of sterilization campaigns, which resulted in the mass sterilization of a third of Puerto Rican women see: Reuben Hill, *The Family and Population Control: A Puerto Rican Experiment in Social Change* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959). Annette B Ramírez de Arellano and Conrad Seipp, *Colonialism, Catholicism, and Contraception: A History of Birth Control in Puerto Rico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley:

space where social workers engaged with clients in the context of social welfare interviews. The intervention of public health nurses continued to go hand in hand with that of social workers. However, the experiences of individuals who were ill were greatly impacted during the period by access to medical treatments that had not been available only years before.

It was at this public health clinic that María encountered a medical-social worker for the first time; this social worker recommended that she apply for additional benefits through the state in order to support her family. Like many other individuals who were sick and unable to work anymore, María took advantage of the new agency in 1943 and applied for aid. The cases of Juana and María fall into this larger category because they both sought benefits after physical ailments made it difficult for them to work. Some individuals sought benefits by going directly to the numerous Public Welfare offices created by the Department of Health around the island in the 1940s and 1950s.³⁷³ Some women initiated these claims for benefits themselves after learning about the programs through different media (newspaper and radio in particular) or through word of mouth. Others encountered medical-social workers who worked in Public Health clinics and Hospitals in the same neighborhoods, these cases would sometimes be transferred to general social workers after the medical condition was treated. In other cases, individuals were reported by someone in the community (sometimes a school teacher or local religious figure) to the Department of Social Welfare as being cases that deserved additional attention. In many of the case files, it is unclear how the initial engagement

University of California Press, 2002), Iris O. López, *Matters of Choice: Puerto Rican Women's Struggle for Reproductive Freedom* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

³⁷³ Manuel R. Rodríguez, *A New Deal for the Tropics: Puerto Rico During the Depression Era, 1932-1935* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011).

transpired, but in one way or another the end result was the intake interview at the Social Welfare offices.

This interview initiated a lengthy study of the life of the individual and of other members of their household. The clients of these programs had to sign documents allowing for an extensive investigation into the details of their personal lives, and they provided references who could be contacted to support their claims. There was also a larger investigation into their economic situations. Social workers not only collected a detailed life history of the applicants but also interviewed numerous other people in order to collect further data, and they wrote to offices all around the island collecting data such as the individual's baptismal, marriage, and divorce certificates. This process resulted in the production of a massive new body of documents about clients.

As María's health worsened her partner Rafael M. departed San Juan for New York in search of better work opportunities. He had been working as a dockworker but ended up joining the waves of migration from San Juan to the United States that had begun by the mid 1940s. It is unclear what Rafael M. did for work in New York, but the file suggests that his financial situation was precarious as well. It is possible that he was working as a contract laborer in agriculture or industry or that he also was working in the expanding service economy. While Rafael had been sending monetary remittances to María, this assistance often came sporadically. María had an increasingly difficult time supporting her three young children on the money that he sent, which averaged 12\$-15\$ a month, and sometimes for months at a time she did not receive notice from him. She struggled to stay healthy and find more work washing and ironing clothes while trying to support her family in *La Perla* in hard times.

Juana Capó: Claiming Benefits

Returning to the case of Juana Capó, we know that by 1943 she had begun her application for benefits because of her ill health in Santurce, Puerto Rico. A closer look at Juana Capó's claim to benefits provides a window into how benefits were allocated to a working elderly woman in Santurce. Of particular interest are two altercations between her and social workers. The first recorded argument that Juana Capó had with a social worker occurred shortly after she applied for benefits. Her original \$7.50 payment was enough to cover a room that she began to rent after getting assistance. During this process Juana Capó signed a document stating that her old friend Luisa was giving her one dollar a month in exchange for her seamstress work. This contract formalized a labor agreement made in the informal labor economy, recording a transfer in money that normally would have been left out of official records. Social workers produced and drafted an entire range of new "informal" documents, contracts, or receipts that included: rental agreements, employer contracts listing wages, and documents specifying the amounts of money sent by family members on the island and from the United States and charity received from other organizations and government programs like school lunches. This documentation produced a bureaucratic web in which the work and lives of Puerto Rican women was regulated by state agencies. For some social workers these documents served simply the purpose of determining eligibility for the allocation of benefits. However, for others this work stemmed from their earlier participation in labor activism in the Women's Bureau in Puerto Rico seeking to regulate the home needle-working industry. Some feminist

social workers had participated in these movements before they had been trained in social work; they tried to document the work that Puerto Rican women did within their own homes in order to assure that these women would receive some compensation for this labor. The negotiation of this type of regulation of informal work served both to provide benefits and also to control and restrict women's labor participation.

The existence of this document recording informal work and signed by Juana is itself fascinating, but even more so is a letter Juana Capó wrote to the Department of Public Health one year later. In this letter she states that she had been pressured into signing this document and that she had not understood its purpose. Furthermore, she claimed that Luisa's help could not be counted on and that she had not received any monetary support from her for over seven months. After social workers contacted Luisa, verifying the termination of support, Juana's benefits were raised by exactly a dollar. Juana had mobilized her ability to read and write to write a letter of complaint. Her literacy and the social mobility that she had experienced as a younger woman had given her an important skill in being able to navigate the expanding bureaucratic state to her best advantage. She also may have discussed this claim with Luisa beforehand, making sure they agreed upon the change in status, whether true or not. In doing this, she had won the challenge to her record, and benefited from it.

This confrontation points to how "facts" that were recorded by social workers were sometimes contested by clients. The production of knowledge in social work case files resulted from the negotiation of complicated power dynamics and struggles between these individuals. These arguments sometimes made their way into the narratives recorded by social workers, as they did in Juana's case, but it is likely they largely went

unrecorded. These negotiations highlight how labor might have been defined via the construction of social benefits programs.³⁷⁴ This experience may have showed Juana Capó that it was worth trying to argue with the authorities in order to maximize her benefits in the future. This negotiation of the terms of benefits shaped the way that programs were created and administered in Puerto Rico. As Puerto Ricans grew to understand how reporting different types of work would help or hinder their claims to economic benefits, they learned increasingly that not listing this economic participation was in their best interest. Within poor communities on the island there was a sharing of knowledge about how to interact with social workers, how to shape one's life narrative and history, in order to provide information that would be the most likely to get the best benefits from the state.³⁷⁵ Essential to this was the strategic erasing of participation in the informal labor economy from the labor narratives told to social workers. The low wages that most of these individuals made from this labor participation in under the table service work or domestic work did not provide a living wage and neither did social welfare benefits. Puerto Ricans developed strategies to use a combination of both types of economic support in order to try to survive in these urban environments.

Another conflict occurred years later, in 1952, after Juana had been ill for a short period and returned to Guayama to stay with some friends for less than a year. During

³⁷⁴ Social workers case files from these programs recorded women's labor in domestic and service work tasks, especially work that was negotiated between middle class and working class women, or between working class women themselves.

³⁷⁵ Helen Safa hints at how some of these debates were a part of the concerns of Puerto Ricans in her study in *El Fanguito*. It would be interesting to think about how much more these conversations and debates would have been prevalent if her research team had not been associated with the state itself. It's likely that because of the government connections of the researchers that informants were less likely to discuss their negotiation of these state programs in these interviews with researchers. Helen Icken Safa. *The Urban Poor of Puerto Rico: a Study in Development and Inequality* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974). Helen Icken Safa, *The Myth of the Male Breadwinner: Women and Industrialization in the Caribbean* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

this time her case was transferred to Guayama's Department of Social Welfare and during this transition in the file a few of her assistance checks were lost in the mail. She wrote to the social workers in San Juan on a few separate occasions, complaining that she had not received her payments and asking politely if the money could be sent to her because she now owed it in back rent. The letters are enclosed in her welfare case file, and Juana's flourishing signature stamps the bottom of each with particular flair. However, it is clear from the social workers reports of these years that they became frustrated with Juana's multiple demands for the checks that she had not received. One particularly annoyed social worker went as far as to complain in her file that Juana kept demanding the money and saying that the office "owed" her. It is unclear from the file if Juana ever received the back payments, and she died less than two years after they were written in 1957. A certificate of death is included in the file and her case was closed.

Juana's demand that the Department of Social Welfare provide her with the back checks they "owed" shows that, over the course of navigating the system of social welfare, Juana had come to feel that she was entitled to these benefits from the state. This is a story that is largely missing from larger discourses over the struggle for socioeconomic rights in Puerto Rico, which has not investigated how the strategic negotiation of the social welfare system was a part of Puerto Rican's lives. As an aging seamstress in San Juan, Juana had the support of a network of employers and friends, but as her health got worse she found it difficult to stay in the city she needed more financial support. Like many other Puerto Ricans she worked to redefine her relationship to the state in a way that would be beneficial to her in these years.

María: Claiming Rights and the Impact of Migrations

María first applied for benefits from the state after her reference by the medical-social work at the *Unidad de Salud Público* in Santurce. Her husband Rafael had left for the United States and she looking for additional support for her children. When she first applied for assistance she told social workers that she was receiving monetary support from her partner Rafael only sporadically. While María's social workers approved benefits because she had tuberculosis, and because she was not receiving aid from Rafael. They filled out her forms in a way that reported that she had been abandoned by her spouse and needed aid because of this. Many other files from the time also deal with women who had been left behind in Puerto Rico by partners that had gone to work in the United States. The increased waves of migration in the period led to strains on family relationships as individuals migrated.³⁷⁶ The social workers had María fill out contracts and reports stating that she was no longer receiving monetary assistance from Rafael and confirming that she had been abandoned. They also made her provide information about witnesses from the community who could testify to the fact that Rafael was no longer in the community or providing her with any help. She gave the name of some of her friends and neighbors in the community and the social workers contacted these references before they determined that she was eligible for aid.

María and Rafael's relationship was actually described in different ways throughout the history of the file and can illustrate some of the ways that Puerto Ricans were dealing with the increasingly multi-sited lives resulting from migration. The file

³⁷⁶ Marixsa Alicea, "A Chambered Nautilus': The Contradictory Nature of Puerto Rican Women's Roles in the Construction of a Transnational Community," *Gender & Society* 11(5) 1997: 597-626.

reports that the circumstances of their relationship changed; according to the documents they were in and out of contact over the years with varying types of support being sent by Rafael. In 1952 the file records an altercation between María and her social workers, who had found out that María had received an unreported amount of money from Rafael. It is unclear how the social workers discovered this, but it may be that someone in the community provided this information or that they had access to another type of financial record that gave them this information.

The social workers were angry with María about this and the case file records how they confronted her through a visit to her home that she was not expecting. This was a part of the new social relations of social welfare that many applicants dreaded as it resulted in the intrusion of social workers into the private lives of clients. These applicants had to be prepared that at any time social workers might enter into their homes. María was confronted about not having reported money that Rafael sent her through one of these at home visits. She responded by admitting that she had received some money from him, and the social workers reported this as a confession of lying. The social workers had her sign a handwritten note on this date, creating a receipt that recorded the \$15 dollars that she had received from Rafael that month. María's name is signed beneath this admission, providing a report of income that was included in her case file.

It appears from the file that her monthly allocation of benefits was reduced because of the money sent by Rafael. María must have known that she was going to receive less money from the state if she reported the amount of money that Rafael sent her. Numerous files from the period illustrate a similar theme: women were increasingly

forced to think about how to report money that they received from partners as well as from other members within their community. In the case of Juana hit had been the small amount she received for work, or charity, from her friend Luisa. The state was actively involved in monitoring these types of informal economic agreements between poor Puerto Ricans as they struggled to make enough money to survive in San Juan.

The migration of Puerto Ricans from rural to urban areas, and then from urban areas to the United States, created patterns of labor that left many Puerto Rican communities torn apart. It was difficult for Puerto Rican families to create networks of support that could sustain them because of this massive displacement. Many of the individuals that applied for benefits were also trying to make a living through the negotiation of intimate and work lives that stretched across the Atlantic. Social workers were also involved in these negotiations as the Puerto Rican government itself established the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor in New York in the 1950s. This regulatory agency sought to help facilitate migration through brokering labor contracts, and it served as a type of consulate for Puerto Ricans in the United States.³⁷⁷ The social workers that worked for this division developed a Social Services Program to help Puerto Rican migrants negotiate applications for public assistance. Many of the individuals that were applying for aid in Puerto Rico ended up applying for aid in the United States as well. These social workers created interagency correspondence networks with their counterparts back on the island. Social work case file information was sent back and forth between social workers on each side. While I do not have information

³⁷⁷ For more information on the Migration Division of Puerto Rico see: Michael Lapp, "Managing Migration: The Migration Division of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1948-1968" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1990). Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010)

about social workers trying to contact Rafael in this case, there are many other similar case files that deal with social workers contacting spouses who had left for the mainland. Puerto Rican social work became an increasingly “transnational” project as social workers created an elaborate bureaucratic system with which to administer benefits.

María’s life had been shaped by her interactions with these state apparatuses and through her interactions with social welfare officials. She had originally applied for benefits when she was a young woman of 25 years old. By 1956 she herself migrated to New York, and the file insinuates that she went to be reunited with her partner Rafael. She was 36 by this time and had been working to claim rights within the Puerto Rican welfare state for over ten years. It is unclear what happened to María once she arrived in New York, but because of her ill health and the difficult economic situation that she faced in a new city it is possible that she too would have gone to the Migration Division’s Department of Social Welfare in order to seek help in trying to obtain benefits in her new home.

Women’s Lives and Work During the Rise of the PPD

Juana and María’s stories are not exceptional ones. They are only two stories amongst hundreds of these case files from the social welfare case records of the Department of Health in the Archivo General de Puerto Rico. This collection provides a wealth of information about the experiences of Puerto Ricans as social welfare was created and the important role of social workers in creating these programs. This close look at cases in San Juan provides a window into thinking about how social workers who

administrated social welfare programs were charged with the responsibility of dealing with patterns of labor that included the experiences of individuals whose lives were shaped by migration from both the rural interior and the plantation regions of Puerto Rico. It shows how the legacies of both emancipation and shifting industrial development impacted the lives of Puerto Ricans during the modernization projects of the 1940s and 1950s.

Stories like Juana Capó's illuminate the ways in which the regulation the labor of women of African descent was an important part of the development of social welfare policy in Puerto Rico. Histories of rural migrants like María and Rafael can also show how the lives of displaced Puerto Ricans were impacted by their navigation of social welfare and work in San Juan and New York. When paired with other historical documentation, these files offer a rich source of biographical information that can help to create a more textured description of Puerto Rican experiences in the 1940s and 1950s. Using these types of sources to create microhistories that move through the shifting landscape of the island and mainland can help to provide a more humanizing account of Puerto Ricans migrant experiences. These sources can help parallel larger research into life histories that show how Puerto Ricans worked to make ends meet during the social shifts of the 20th century. They widely demonstrated how the intersection between work and social benefits was a site of struggle and negotiation between different groups of Puerto Rican working women, social workers, and women in the informal labor economy

Both the role of social workers in this community and the increasingly transnational nature of the expanding web of the welfare state will be the focus of my upcoming dissertation chapters. Looking further at the biographical material about social

workers from the period as well as social welfare files of Puerto Rican migrants in New York City will provide the basis for the upcoming chapters in this project. The labor histories of Puerto Ricans who received social welfare benefits can provide a new perspective on how labor practices in Puerto Rico were shaped through welfare administration. These histories can also bring to light the historical experiences of Puerto Ricans who shaped history itself through their navigation and participation in social welfare programs.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mobile Social Workers and Clients: Transnational Labor Migration, Reform and Regulation

On November 28, 1946 a group of Puerto Rican women marched in a picket in front of the Chicago offices of Castle, Barton, and Associates, a private employment agency that had brought them to the city to become domestic workers. The protesters were joined by allies that included Puerto Rican students from the University of Chicago as well as labor rights organizers that supported their demand that the agency be accountable for the terrible labor conditions that the migrant contract workers had faced in the city.³⁷⁸ The women on the picket line had been recruited from the Puerto Rican

³⁷⁸ This essay builds on a rich tradition of Puerto Rican labor histories that have explored the contours of Puerto Rican migration, the central role of Puerto Rican women as founders of Puerto Rican migrant communities, and of the important role that domestic workers played in this history. See for example: Maura I. Toro-Morn, "Gender, Class, Family, and Migration: Puerto Rican Women in Chicago," *Gender & Society* 6 (1995): 712-726. Maura Toro-Morn "Género, trabajo y migración: las empleadas domésticas puertorriqueñas en Chicago," *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 7 (1999): 102-125. Maura I. Toro-Morn "Yo era muy arriesgada: A Historical Overview of the Work Experiences of Puerto Rican Women in Chicago," *Centro Journal* 13 (2001): 25-43. Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001). Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances: The Politics of Class, Race, and Space in Puerto Rican Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Gina M. Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Mérida M. Rúa, *Latino Urban Ethnography and the Work of Elena Padilla* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010). Mérida M. Rúa, *A Grounded Identity: Making New Lives in Chicago's Puerto Rican Neighborhoods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

cities of San Juan and Ponce, where around 600 had signed labor contracts that were drafted by the private agency and overseen by the Puerto Rican Government's Department of Labor. When the Puerto Rican women arrived they encountered low wages, long hours, and deductions from their pay for transportation and other costs. They responded by walking away from their jobs, forming alliances with other migrants and communities, and seeking alternative forms of employment in the city. Months earlier Castle, Barton, and Associates had advertised in Chicago newspapers that Puerto Rican workers were available and solicited requests from potential employers. Lured by the advertisements and the promise of workers willing to accept half the going rate in Chicago, the employers were willing to pay transportation costs up front. They sought to undercut the rising wage scale for domestic work that resulted from local domestic workers organizing for better wages and conditions and legal restrictions on immigrant labor.

The migration of Puerto Ricans to Chicago to become domestic workers has been the subject of a number of scholarly investigations because it represents a crucial flashpoint in the struggle for Puerto Rican migrants' rights in the United States.³⁷⁹ As Puerto Rican Studies scholars have shown, the migration of domestics brought into public conversation and debate the rights of Puerto Rican workers to move to the United States as well as whether, as U.S. citizens and colonial subjects with restricted citizenship rights on the island, they had access to the same citizenship rights and benefits as other citizens when they were in the United States.

³⁷⁹ Historian Mérida M. Rúa provides a background to this history in her community history of Chicago's Puerto Rican diaspora: Mérida M. Rúa, *A Grounded Identity*.

My focus in this chapter takes a different vantage point, exploring the ways that the intervention of social workers served to regulate labor migrations. I am interested here in showing how social workers with expertise on migration took on new roles when were charged by the Puerto Rican state with attending to the migration of women and regulating care work in the growing Puerto Rican diaspora. I begin by looking closely at the work of Carmen Isales, a social worker who helped develop the first social welfare programs in Puerto Rico, as she intervened in Labor problems that were presented by the Chicago domestic workers' migration. I consider in particular how Isales did not work alone but rather served as a bridge between the Puerto Rican colonial government and United States progressive liberal reformers. For example, she developed crucial relationships with agents of the Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor, and agents representing public employment agencies in United States. Through these collaborations Isales and other Puerto Rican women representatives of the Puerto Rican government established important networks that were used to strengthen and promote gendered forms of migration. The second example that I is that of Francis Phillips, a woman who helped to regulate household labor among black women in the United States. She took on a new role through her work developing educational programs for household workers in Puerto Rico that were meant explicitly to train Puerto Rican women for jobs in the United States.

Throughout the chapter I explore the way that social workers became entangled with regulating the work of Puerto Rican migration to United States. They were ideally suited for this task because of their longer history of involvement in the United States and because of their continued training in social work programs in the United States. The

Puerto Rican government also realized that the expertise that Puerto Rican social workers had developed while working in social welfare programs in United States could provide a crucial bridge between the Puerto Rican government and local agencies in U.S. cities. They hope that through using these women's expertise they might be able to affect a positive transition for Puerto Rican migrants.

Most histories of Puerto Rican migration have argued that a group of technocratic elites, armed with a liberal and social scientific vision, emerged as "managers" of migration under the populist policies of the Partido Popular Democrático in the 1940s.³⁸⁰ These studies have emphasized how Puerto Rican state agents' control over migrant politics in New York suppressed more radical visions of citizenship rights during the period.³⁸¹ While I agree with this assertion, I also believe that a homogenous vision of Puerto Rican state officials and their politics does not fully captured the role of state agents in expanding the citizenship rights of Puerto Ricans on the island and in the U.S.³⁸² My goal is to highlight the active role of professional Puerto Rican women within political networks, a group whose history has remained largely missing or marginalized within histories of migration or its management.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). Michael Lapp, *Managing Migration: The Migration Division of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1948-1968*. Thesis (Ph. D.)--Johns Hopkins University, 1991. Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

³⁸¹ Lorrin Thomas. *Puerto Rican Citizen*.

³⁸² I also draw this insight from conversations with Aldo Lauria Santiago about the history of the Migration Division. LASA presentation 2012.

³⁸³ One notable exception is: Virginia Sánchez Korrol, "The Forgotten Migrant: Educated Puerto Rican Women in New York City" in Edna Acosta-Belén (eds), *The Puerto Rican Woman* (1986): 170-79. Virginia Sánchez Korrol, "In Search of Unconventional Women: Histories of Puerto Rican Women in Religious Vocations Before Mid-Century," *The Oral History Review* (1988): 47-63.

This chapter explores how between World War II and 1948 Puerto Rican social workers oversaw contract labor migration to the United States. Exploring the different spaces where social workers developed social work practices to regulate and reform migration the chapter begins by providing an overview of emigration and then examines the role of the Puerto Rican social worker named Carmen Isales and her work intervening in difficulties that arose as private employment agencies placed Puerto Rican women domestic workers in Chicago after 1944. Through this close examination of Isales work I will show how Puerto Rican reformers worked alongside working-class women in order to pressure the Puerto Rican state to intervene and regulate labor migration. At the same time, reformers developed extensive relationships with United States organizers and activists that sought to improve the labor conditions of women during the period. The chapter also explores the ways in which Francis Phillips, a black woman who worked to regulate household labor in New York, was enlisted by the Puerto Rican government to develop the household worker training program on the island. This program placed Puerto Rican women in positions as domestic workers in a variety of cities in the United States.

The final section will show how as a result of these various discourses the Puerto Rican government developed a new regulatory agency, the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Government's Department of Labor, with offices throughout the United States. I will introduce how social workers were charged with staffing the emerging system of Puerto Rican regulation of contract labor. While dealing with limited staff and funding, this agency served as important intermediary between Puerto Ricans and United States government agencies including social service oriented programs. In essence, this

chapter motions towards an expanded conceptualization of the social worker as a key figure in the regulation of labor migration.

Migration in the 1940s: State Sponsored Emigration

During the 1940s, growing numbers of Puerto Rican social workers entered positions working with migrants in the United States and communities in Puerto Rico that were impacted by migration. As discussed in the previous chapter, the rise of a new populist party, the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) began a transformation in the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Under the PPD new social reforms were pushed forward that were closely linked to the liberal U.S. and Puerto Rican New Deal leadership.³⁸⁴ The PPD proposed to transform Puerto Rican society and economy through a development and industrialization project that became known as “Operation Bootstrap.” This modernization plan sought to bring capital and jobs to Puerto Rico by providing incentives to U.S. corporations, including tax breaks and cheap labor.³⁸⁵ Its name suggested that Puerto Ricans would lift themselves up by their own bootstraps. One of the main steps towards the development of this program was the insular legislature’s passing of the Industrial Incentives Act of 1947 and the creation of

³⁸⁴ Eileen Findlay, *We Are Left Without a Father Here: Masculinity, Domesticity, and Migration in Postwar Puerto Rico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

³⁸⁵ For more on Operation Bootstrap see: James L. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

Fomento, an industrialization plan that relied on raising funds from United States companies to come to the United States.³⁸⁶

The Puerto Rican reformers in the PPD were particularly dedicated to the idea of using social scientific techniques in order to create a modernizing program that they hoped would attract industry. The PPD argued for a “planning” centered approach to social and economic change in Puerto Rico that relied specifically on liberal technocratic expertise from the United States as well as the training of Puerto Rican experts.³⁸⁷ The University of Puerto Rico played an especially important role in the government work of the period, especially after the creation of the Social Science Research Center in 1945 and the development of a planning board. Puerto Rico was seen by United States scholars as a laboratory in which to study industrialization and development, and became known as the “showcase of democracy.”³⁸⁸

The Puerto Rican government targeted overpopulation as one of the main problems facing the modernization program of the island. State administrators believed that reducing the island’s population would help curb high levels of unemployment. With this in mind, the Puerto Rican government supported by United States planning developed a population control program that by provided access to birth control. Many

³⁸⁶ César J Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

³⁸⁷ Lapp, *Managing Migration*. Antonio Lauria-Perriceli, “A Study in Historical and Critical Anthropology: The Making of The People of Puerto Rico,” Thesis (Ph. D.)--New School for Social Research, 1989. Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*. Angel G. Quintero Rivera, “La base social de la transformacion ideologica del Partido Popular en la decada del ’40” in Gerardo Navas Davila, ed. *Cambio y desarrollo en Puerto Rico: La transformacion ideologica del Partido Popular Democrático* (Rio Piedras, PR: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1980).

³⁸⁸ Lapp, *Managing Migration*. Michael Lapp, “The Rise and Fall of Puerto Rico as a Social Laboratory, 1945-1965,” *Social Science History* (1995): 169-199. Antonio Lauria-Perriceli, “A Study in Historical and Critical Anthropology”

social workers worked alongside public health officials to create what historian Laura Briggs has termed a “progressive eugenics” movement on the island that advocated birth control and later sterilization as a means to reduce population and modernize Puerto Rico.³⁸⁹ Some of the main targets of social reforms during the 1940s were working class women who were sometimes cast by the state as being sexually deviant, unruly, and in need of education in how to be properly feminine and domestic. However, as the previous chapter showed, social reformers and middle-class women also sought to gain recognition for women’s reproductive labor through the formation of social welfare provisions that would provide support to women and families in need. The contours and politics of class formation under populist leadership emerged out of the struggles around the creation of new state structures and institutions and their administration.

In addition to eugenic policies the Puerto Rican government began exploring opportunities to encourage emigration through labor migration, something that had occurred in other historical moments and now was reinvestigated with renewed interest.³⁹⁰ They formalized the development of this policy through the creation of an Emigration Advisory Committee in July of 1945 that discussed how migration should be encouraged and regulated. One of the ways that officials sought to propel migration was through new contract labor programs by the Puerto Rican government and the U.S. War

³⁸⁹ See: Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*. Annette B. Ramírez de Arellano, Annette B., and Conrad Seipp. *Colonialism, Catholicism, and Contraception: A History of Birth Control in Puerto Rico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

³⁹⁰ Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005). Edwin Maldonado, "Contract Labor and the Origins of Puerto Rican Communities in the United States" *International Migration Review* (1979): 103-121. C. Wright Mills, Clarence Ollson Senior, and Rose Kohn Goldsen, *The Puerto Rican Journey; New York's Newest Migrants* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967). Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, History Task Force, City University of New York, *Labor Migration Under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979).

Manpower Commission.³⁹¹ The War Man Power Commission Was responsible for bringing over two thousand Puerto Ricans to work in the United States in 1944 alone.³⁹² Among these workers were a large number that were recruited to work in canneries, such as those for the Campbell Soup Company. During the war many more Puerto Rican workers were recruited to the United States to fill jobs as agricultural, factory, and domestic workers.³⁹³

Expanding the Employment and Identification Office in New York

In addition to creating new programs, the Emigration Advisory Committee also discussed the possibility of transforming the Puerto Rican government's role in the United States through the offices that it operated on the mainland. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Puerto Rican government had operated an Employment and Identification Office in New York City since 1930. Located in Harlem, this office issued

³⁹¹ Clarence Ollson Senior, *Puerto Rican Emigration* (Rio Piedras: Social Science Research Center, Univ. of Puerto Rico, 1947), César J Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies*. Philadelphia (Temple University Press, 2001). Lapp, *Managing Migration*, 37

³⁹² Carmen Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 52

³⁹³ Studies on the contract labor program include: Edwin Maldonado, "Contract Labor and the Origins of Puerto Rican Communities in the United States," *International Migration Review* (1979): 103-121. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, History Task Force, City University of New York, *Labor Migration Under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), Jorge Duany, *Blurred Borders: Transnational Migration between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), Mérida M. Rúa, *A Grounded Identity: Making New Lives in Chicago's Puerto Rican Neighborhoods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)



Figure IV.1. Puerto Rican domestic worker with her daughter in the 1940s. Author's grandmother, Formeria Jimenez Amador. *Authors Collection*.

identification cards and helped place workers in jobs in the city, playing a similar role to other private and government sponsored employment agencies of the period. This agency opened in 1930 at 1770 Madison Avenue, in the middle of Harlem's Puerto Rican community.³⁹⁴ While the office served multiple functions, its most important was to provide identification cards that proved that Puerto Ricans were U.S. citizens and were

³⁹⁴ Lawrence R. Chenault wrote one of the most comprehensive sociological studies of Puerto Rican migration during the 1930s and documented the formation of the Puerto Rican Employment Agency. Chenault noted that, "[to] the Puerto Rican this office is much more than just an employment agency. It may help him collect his wages, advise him about a pension, assist him with a problem or relief, or perform any of various other necessary services for him." Lawrence Chenault, *The Puerto Rican Migrant in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938): 75. The history of these employment agencies is also described in: Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*. Jorge Duany, *Blurred Borders*.

meant to help them avoid discrimination against foreign workers. Migrants used these documents when searching for jobs and dealing with employers, landlords, schools, and representatives of social service agencies.³⁹⁵ Though limited by a small staff, this regulatory agency managed to expand the involvement of the Puerto Rican government in the lives of migrant citizens. Its role as an employment service made this government bureau function similarly to many other private employment agencies that helped workers to find jobs. The Puerto Rican government viewed the agency as potentially providing a useful base for addressing issues that had already arisen from Puerto Rican labor migration and integration into New York City. Despite its small staff, it had still become an important space within which the Puerto Rican New York community organized.³⁹⁶

Indeed the need for this type of agency resulted from the racism and exclusion that Puerto Rican workers had already faced when migrating to the United States. Many Puerto Ricans faced racism because they were imagined in U.S. society as a non-white population, an idea rooted in their mixed racial heritage and status as colonial subjects in need of U.S. tutelage. Migrants encountered new racial classifications in the U.S. and discovered that claiming multiple or mixed racial heritages (as was common in Puerto Rico) fell outside of a “black” and “white” binary.³⁹⁷ These migrants were also often

³⁹⁵ Lorrin Thomas discusses the way that Puerto Rican government officials in the Bureau of Employment and Identification constructed and deployed racial categories within the employment agency, particularly in the creation of identification documents issued by the agency. Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*.

³⁹⁶ Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*.

³⁹⁷ On Puerto Ricans and race in the United States see: Clara E. Rodriguez, *Puerto Ricans: Born in the USA* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1989). Clara E. Rodriguez, *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2000). Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Jorge Duany, "The Rough Edges of Puerto Rican Identities: Race, Gender,

lumped together as one non-white “other” by the city press and government agencies that reported that they were a drain on local resources or that claimed that they came to U.S. to collect relief from New Deal programs. City officials’ concern over migration gained a catch phrase, the “Puerto Rican Problem,” which suggested that islanders were failing to integrate or adjust to U.S. society.³⁹⁸ The racial difference Puerto Ricans experienced was further inscribed through the limited labor opportunities available to Puerto Ricans, and the exclusions they faced in a declining urban industrial sector, which blocked social mobility or participation in the “whitening” of European immigrants.³⁹⁹

City officials and social service agencies in the United States also had complained to both the federal and Puerto Rican governments about problems with Puerto Rican migration. They claimed that Puerto Rican migrants failed to properly adjust to United States society and were creating a drain on local resources. The Puerto Rican government sought to address these concerns so that they could manage public opinion about Puerto Rican migration and reception. Among other reports that the committee discussed were initial reports by New York social workers working with the Welfare Council who

and Transnationalism," *Latin American Research Review* 40 (2005): 177-190. Juan Flores, *The Diaspora Strikes Back: Caribeño Tales of Learning and Turning* (London: Routledge, 2010).

³⁹⁸ Historian Lorrin Thomas has discussed how Puerto Rican migrant communities were received in New York City during this period: Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago, 2010).

³⁹⁹ Scholars have explored how European immigrants to the United States gradually became “white” through their incorporation in U.S. economies during this period: David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991). Thomas Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Puerto Rican studies scholars have noted how this was not the case for Puerto Rican migrants during this period, see for example: Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island & in the United States* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Peter Carlo-Becerra, “Which Is ‘White’ and Which ‘Colored’?: Notes on Race And/or Color Among Puerto Ricans in Interwar New York City.” Ph.D. Dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 2012.

reported that Puerto Rican communities were applying in growing numbers for relief and assistance.⁴⁰⁰ Over the generations workers and their advocates had responded to social exclusion and racism by protesting poor conditions and demanding the Puerto Rican government intervene to regulate these labor conditions. Among these advocates was U.S. Congressman Vito Marcantonio, who the Puerto Rican government was particularly concerned about because of his socialist politics and support of the islands independence movement. Marcantonio had garnered considerable popular support among the migrant population many of whom were also supporters of both socialism and independence. In his offices who frequently provided help to migrants facing discrimination his popularity was bolstered by Spanish-speaking employees. Concerned about pro-independence and socialist political organizing among Puerto Ricans on the mainland, the PPD developed numerous counter measures during the period, going as far as sponsoring a campaign against Marcantonio.⁴⁰¹ As Lorrin Thomas and others have pointed out the PPD was critiqued by many leftist Puerto Rican migrants during the period for espousing a liberal agenda at the expense of providing more extensive help to Puerto Rican migrants.⁴⁰²

The outcome of the Puerto Rican government's debate and discussion about migration in the Emigration Advisory Council was to transform the Bureau of Employment and Identification into an expanded Bureau of Employment and Migration

⁴⁰⁰ I his study of the Migration Division historian Michael Lapp cites the minutes of the meetings of the New York City Welfare Council as well as the 1948 study of Puerto Rican migration they published: Lapp, *Managing Migration*, 51. Welfare Council of New York City. *Puerto Ricans in New York City: The Report of the Committee on Puerto Ricans in New York City of the Welfare Council of New York City* (New York: Arno Press, 1975).

⁴⁰¹ Edgardo Meléndez, "Vito Marcantonio, Puerto Rican Migration, and the 1949 Mayoral Election in New York City," *Centro Journal*, 22, no.2 (2010): 199-233.

⁴⁰² Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*.

in 1948. The first director chosen for the agency was a social worker named Manuel Cabranes who served in the position for almost four years.⁴⁰³ Cabranes had participated in the development of social welfare programs on the island and had been involved in creating the first social welfare programs in rural schools in the 1930s.⁴⁰⁴ Cabranes also had helped to establish a system of juvenile justice on the island through his work as a probation officer for minors as well as time spent reforming correctional institutions to create programs for children throughout the 1930s. He had later studied at Fordham University and was recruited to work in the United States with Spanish speaking migrants and had worked as the director of the Melrose Settlement House in New York City.⁴⁰⁵ The choice of a social worker and social welfare expert to lead the Puerto Rican government's new migration agency is important because it suggests the type of work that the Puerto Rican government believed it needed to do in the city. Manuel Cabranes was hired because he could provide a bridge between Puerto Rican and United States social welfare agencies. While the office didn't have much power when it opened because of its small staff, it did provide much needed referrals for migrants to social services and offered a hub for discussions about problems with the various contract labor programs developed by private agencies and the Puerto Rican government in the 1940s.

⁴⁰³ Lapp, *Managing Migration*, 105

⁴⁰⁴ Manuel Cabranes published about his experience participating in the rural school movement in social welfare journals from the period. See: Manuel Cabranes, "El Trabajo Social en las Segundas Unidades Rurales" *Revista de Servicio Social*, 1, No. 4, Aug-Sept 1939, 8-10. There is a resume of Manuel Cabranes work attached to Dorothy Bourne's study of the development of profession of social work in Puerto Rico as well. In this document she notes that he had received a degree from the Fordham School of Sociology and Social Service before working for "[t]wo years conducting field work for the Emergency Relief Bureau and the Court of General Sessions of New York City at the Children's Court of Syracuse." In 1935 when the Bourne's study was published he was in "residence" at the Union Settlement in New York City. Bourne, *Professional Training for Social Work in Puerto Rico*, 12.

⁴⁰⁵ There are more biographical details about Manuel Cabranes in Michael Lapp's dissertation on the history of the Migration Division. Lapp cites an unpublished memoir of Cabranes in the collections of his son, Judge Jose A. Cabranes. See: Lapp, *Managing Migration*.

Contract Labor Migration and Social Work Experts: “The Chicago Experiment”

The Puerto Rican government developed its own contract labor program in part in response to issues with privately owned U.S. agencies who conducted the majority of labor recruitment as the War Man Power Commission wound down. Among the workers recruited and placed were domestic workers who were sent to Chicago, Philadelphia, and Atlanta.⁴⁰⁶ The largest group, made up of hundreds of women recruited by Castle, Barton and Associates, Inc., which had offices in Ponce and San Juan, began arriving in 1944. The majority of these domestic workers were placed in Chicago, where they developed a new Puerto Rican community.⁴⁰⁷ In Chicago, the employment agency placed advertisements in local newspapers noting that Puerto Rican domestic workers were available for hire through the agency. The potential employers who responded to these messages filled out paperwork requesting domestic workers with particular attributes and skills. Meanwhile, on the island, Puerto Rican women also signed contracts that were overseen by the Puerto Rico’s Department of Labor. According to later reports over half of the women were under twenty years old and although there was a cut off age of eighteen a number of younger teenagers signed up. Among them were numerous

⁴⁰⁶ Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*.

⁴⁰⁷ See for example these studies on labor migration and the recruitment of domestic workers: Elena Padilla, “Puerto Rican Immigrants in New York and Chicago: A Study in Comparative Assimilation” (MA thesis, University of Chicago, 1947). Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*. Gina M. Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story*. Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, *The Puerto Rican Diaspora*. Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*. Maura I. Toro-Morn “Gender, Class, Family, and Migration.” Maura I. Toro-Morn, “Yo era muy arriesgada.” Maura I. Toro-Morn, “Género, trabajo y migración.” Marixsa Alicea, ““A Chambered Nautilus” The Contradictory Nature of Puerto Rican Women’s Role in the Social Construction of a Transnational Community.” *Gender & Society* 11, (1997): 597-626. Mérida M. Rúa, *Latino Urban Ethnography and the Work of Elena Padilla Urbana*: University of Illinois Press, 2010). Mérida M. Rúa, *A Grounded Identity*.

participants who thought these jobs would allow them time to study or gain other experiences and opportunities in Chicago.⁴⁰⁸

From the start the racial politics of the domestic workers recruitment were at the forefront of their incorporation into Chicago. The advertisements that the agency placed noted that “Puerto Ricans [White]” were available to work, while later reports noted that “colored” Puerto Ricans had been sent to Florida and Atlanta. Unlike the earlier placement of workers in New York, the racial description in the advertisement may have signaled that Puerto Ricans migrant workers were similar to earlier waves of European immigrant workers previously employed in domestic service. Moreover, officials working for the Puerto Rican government also began describing the migration of Puerto Rican women to the U.S. as being akin to that of European women.⁴⁰⁹ The program was cast as a benevolent uplift project that produced Puerto Ricans with an opportunity to be integrated into the United States like European immigrants before them. Puerto Ricans racial demarcation as “white” also explicitly worked to set them apart from black and Mexican women already working in domestic service in the city. However, despite the attempts of the company to market these women as white, the racial and colonial logics and discourses of both employers and the U.S. government officials foiled these attempts and instead cast the workers as non-white.⁴¹⁰ How Puerto Rican race was understood was compounded by the residential and social segregation they encountered in Chicago, which the majority navigated by living in Mexican and black communities and

⁴⁰⁸ Mérida M. Rúa, *Latino Urban Ethnography and the Work of Elena Padilla*.

⁴⁰⁹ Maura I. Toro-Morn, “Género, trabajo y migración.”

⁴¹⁰ The racialization of the workers was one of the central concerns of Elena Padilla’s thesis. She tries also to work through the intergenerational and spatially constrained contours of how Puerto Ricans experienced race in Chicago. Mérida M. Rúa, *Latino Urban Ethnography and the Work of Elena Padilla*.

socializing with their neighbors.

When the workers arrived many faced difficult labor conditions and were required to work long hours for low pay. The first response of many of the Puerto Rican women domestic workers was to walk away from their jobs. They did so as soon as they created other networks of friends and alliances in the city, moving out of employers' houses and the temporary housing in hotels. When some women left their jobs, they became the targets of local police who arrested a number of them while conducting a local anti-prostitution campaign.⁴¹¹ The racial and sexual politics of Puerto Rican women's incorporation was documented in a number of articles written about the women, which suggested that because of the low wages they received in Chicago they had begun working as prostitutes. Concern over Puerto Rican women's integration into black and Mexican neighborhoods and their socializing with men from these communities framed these accusations. A number of the women were arrested, likely after socializing in dance and social clubs in the city.⁴¹²

The domestic workers were invited to social events and teas that were held by the YWCA; here they shared their experiences with other women. Gathering together with other domestic workers also provided a forum where the Puerto Rican women became friends, and they began traveling together afterwards to other gatherings and spaces, sometimes meeting up with Puerto Rican men who were also in the city as contract

⁴¹¹ "60 Puerto Ricans Picked up by Vice Squads," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 5, 1947, 17. Mérida Rúa also mentions that employers threatened domestic workers that if they left their jobs they would call the police and that they could be "deported" back to Puerto Rico. Mérida M. Rúa, *A Grounded Identity*, 8.

⁴¹² Nicholas De Genova, "'White' Puerto Rican Migrants, the Mexican Colony, 'Americanization,' and Latino History" in Mérida M. Rúa, *Latino Urban Ethnography and the Work of Elena Padilla*.

workers.⁴¹³ The YMCA was also a space where discussions about domestic work, training, and professionalization in household work, and the regulation of this labor had long been underway. It was at the YMCA that Puerto Rican women compared their work experiences and the wages they were making with those of other domestics; they realized that they were making half as much as the normal rate for household work in the city while working longer hours and having less time off. The Puerto Rican workers also learned that the agency was trying to undercut the wages of local household workers by bringing Puerto Rican women to the city.

At the YMCA, Puerto Rican workers also found out about the ongoing struggle of household workers, and particularly of black women, to demand better working conditions. They met women who were already organizing to create labor standards for domestic work. Among them were members of a group called the “Household Employers League,” a group representing domestic workers who met at the YMCA. These women would join them in seeking better working conditions for Puerto Rican women and later joined the picket lines when the workers organized a strike. Puerto Rican women quickly learned that despite numerous attempts by domestic workers to organize for inclusion under protective labor legislation, their labor continued to be excluded from most regulations. In coming to the United States to work as domestics they had entered a contentious political field that was in the process of extensive political mobilization and the subject of much debate.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

Puerto Rican Women Mobilizing to Reform Migration

Domestic workers placed in Chicago by private firms also joined forces with a group of Puerto Rican graduate students at the University of Chicago, including Elena Padilla, a young anthropologist, and Muna Muñoz Lee, the daughter of the leader of Puerto Rico's senate and the PPD.⁴¹⁴ They raised awareness about the labor conditions that the workers faced through an already existing network of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. They realized both that the terms of the contracts they received were not good and that the contracts themselves could not legally be enforced; there were no U.S. laws specifically regulating domestic work and, when workers attempted to contact the Puerto Rican government about contract violations, there was little response. Together the students and more than fifty domestic workers organized labor strikes, picketed the offices of a private employment agency, and documented the experiences of the domestic workers.⁴¹⁵ The students also reached out to the established social activists and labor leader Jesús Colón in New York and some of the domestic workers from Chicago traveled to the Puerto Rican community in New York to discuss the conditions they had faced.⁴¹⁶ They brought public attention to what had happened demanding that the Puerto Rican government intervene in the situation. Their public demands resulted in a number

⁴¹⁴ Merida Rúa has documented the network of professional Puerto Rican women and students at the University of Chicago who allied themselves with the Puerto Rican domestic workers. Mérida M. Rúa, *A Grounded Identity*. Mérida M. Rúa, *Latino Urban Ethnography*.

⁴¹⁵ According to Mérida Rúa a group of more than fifty domestic workers held a protest on Thanksgiving Day where they "refused to work or speak English" and the protest was also attended by, "members of the United States Progressives and the Worker's Defense League." Mérida M. Rúa, *A Grounded Identity*, 11-13.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

of Puerto Rican officials traveling to Chicago to investigate the case.

One of the first state representatives from Puerto Rico to become involved in the case was a Carmen Isales, a social worker who had been trained at the University of Chicago and helped build social welfare programs on the island. In an interview many years later, Isales described the ways that her early work on these issues profoundly shaped her life story and career trajectory.⁴¹⁷ As a student in Chicago she had worked with representatives of some of the Chicago social agencies that were now working with the Puerto Rican workers. Isales had heard about the domestic work program when she saw the advertisements that were placed in Puerto Rico seeking workers. She was skeptical of the offers that she saw in the papers; they suggested that workers would receive thirty-five dollars a week, much more than the ten or twelve dollar a month average that a domestic workers could make on the island. However, Isales knew that in the United States most domestic workers received closer to fifty dollars a month because while she was a student she had tried to hire help and was told by friends it was too expensive. Curious about the intentions of the employment agency, Isales decided to look into the case when she traveled to Chicago shortly after on a vacation, which doubled as an opportunity for her to check in with administrators at the Chicago School of Social Work about the possibility of finishing her degree.

According to Isales when she arrived in Chicago she discovered that the Puerto Rican domestic workers were living in “horrible” conditions, and she described the practice as a system of indentured servitude and accused the Puerto Rican colonial

⁴¹⁷ Fernando Cros and Ana Helvia Quintero, “Entrevista a Carmen Isales,” *Revista del Consejo General de Educacion*, Vol 1, Num 1, 1992-93. Located in the archives of the Fundacion Luis Muñoz Marín, DIVEDCO collections, Folder: Juan Davila Diaz.

government of supporting it. Isales noted that the Puerto Rica Department of Labor agents had a relationship with the private agency that blocked the possibility of justice for the workers and that when the Puerto Rican Commissioner of Labor traveled to Chicago he was picked up in a company car hired by Castle, Barton and Associates. She also mentioned that when she began her investigation of the conditions of the workers, the company immediately accused her of being a communist, something that she later said was then “the quickest way to stop social justice.” Despite the denunciations she received from the company, she found support from the YMCA, which she noted “had always been a pioneer in these cases” and which offered her an office. She then gained the secretarial support of a friend named Juanita Aldea who was also on vacation in Chicago. She also met up with the Puerto Rican students who were already working to organize the domestic workers.⁴¹⁸

The frustrated employers of the domestic workers organized and tried to recuperate the loss in transportation costs they had paid to the private agencies for the domestic workers to come to the U.S. They had planned to gradually deduct these costs from the salaries and when workers left them they could not, they demanded that Castle, Barton, and Associates, or the women themselves, repay them. Some employers threatened workers that they would be deported or arrested by the police if the transportation costs were not repaid. When workers did walk away, they immediately encountered state organizations and agencies employed the same regulatory regimes as immigrant communities and communities of color in Chicago. They were frequently arrested on charges of prostitution and vagrancy and encountered social agencies that,

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

upon realizing they couldn't deport them because they were U.S. citizens, instead denied them social assistance based on residency requirements. This was the same tool often used to discriminate against black Chicagoans when they applied for public assistance. As tensions escalated and the private agency argued it was not responsible, the employers began to sue the workers for breach of their contracts and for the expenses they owed employers. Isales went to court with the women in order to help them to get the charges dropped.

Isales began her investigation into the case by interviewing thirty of the domestic workers who had participated in the program.⁴¹⁹ In her report to the Puerto Rican government, she specifically described how employers sought to exploit Puerto Rican women by paying them less than U.S. workers, undercutting even the relatively low wages that they had offered black women for these same jobs.⁴²⁰ Isales also drew attention to the lack of coverage of domestic work by U.S. labor legislation, suggesting that women's participation in this type of work made them vulnerable because there were no labor standards. After receiving Isales' report, the Commissioner of Labor of Puerto Rico, Fernando Sierra Berdecia, traveled to the United States to further investigate the

⁴¹⁹ Carmen Isales was a social welfare expert that had experience building social welfare programs in Puerto Rico. Government officials with the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor later enlisted her to help them study and write about Puerto Rican migration to the United States. Clarence Ollson Senior and Carmen Isales, *The Puerto Ricans of New York City* (New York, 1948.)

⁴²⁰ In Merida Rúa's study of Puerto Rican migration she references the report that Carmen Isales wrote: Carmen Isales, "Report on Cases of Puerto Rican Laborers Brought to Chicago to Work as Domestics and Foundry Workers Under Contract with Castle, Barton and Associates, Inc," (Confidential), March 22, 1947 (Section IV, series 2, subseries 9B, folder 277, Fundacion Luis Muñoz Marín, Puerto Rico). Lilia Fernandez's also has cited an earlier version of the report that was published in 1946. Carmen Isales, "Situacion de los Obreros Puertorriquenos Contratados por la Agencia de Empleos Castle, Barton and Assoc," December, 1946, cartapacio 277, caja 15, subseries 9, serie 2, seccion IV, Fundacion Luis Muñoz Marín, Puerto Rico). For more information see: Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar* (Chicago, 2012), 48.

domestic work program.⁴²¹ Meanwhile, workers and their allies continued to call attention to the state's complicity in placing Puerto Ricans in unregulated, low paid, and dangerous occupations.

While she was in Chicago, Isales also collaborated with field agents from the Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor. The Women's Bureau representatives noted that situations like those created by the Chicago program could be averted if the U.S. government regulated domestic work and if migrant labor was managed by state agencies.⁴²² Frieda Miller, the director of the Women's Bureau, later discussed the situation in Chicago as highlighting the crucial role that field representatives could play regulating women's labor in local contexts.⁴²³ She described how on October 8, 1946 a "committee representing public and private agencies" had contacted the agency for "both facts on the rights and responsibilities of employers, workers, and community agencies involved, and help in dealing with the human problems of the workers." This group included welfare agencies, civic and religious groups, individual employers, and later the Puerto Rican workers themselves who "complained of their conditions of work, deductions from their pay which they did not understand, and of other misrepresentation." One of the main issues that the Puerto Rican workers faced was

⁴²¹ Puerto Rican government representative Vicente Giegel-Polance traveled to Chicago to investigate the case as well and stated "he would recommend better contracts for the Puerto Rican workers who come to the United States in groups." This trip was documented in the Chicago press: "Puerto Rican Senator Here to Aid Natives," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 10, 1947, 26. Also see: Carmen Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 58.

⁴²² For example, this question was raised during Congressional hearings on the Federal Security Appropriations Bill in 1947, within which field agents of the Women's Bureau discussed their role intervening in the domestic work scandal in Chicago. See: Testimony of Miss Freida S. Miller, Director of the Women's Bureau U.S. Department of Labor-- Before the Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee United States, *Labor-Health, Education and Welfare Appropriations. Hearings before the subcommittee Washington*, 1948, 138-146. Original document located in Frieda Miller Papers, Schlesinger Library, box 8, folder 168.

⁴²³ Ibid.

that most of the workers in social and government agencies did not understand or respect that Puerto Ricans were United States citizens and should be afforded the same legal protections as other workers.

The Women's Bureau agents joined Isales and the Puerto Rican students to intervene on behalf of the Puerto Rican workers. As Miller noted, "[c]onsideration of all these questions had to be in terms of the undeniable right of Puerto Ricans, as American citizens, to take up residence and employment with exactly the same freedom as any other American citizens. And I may say that that was not very well understood by the community in which they found themselves." However, United States citizenship did not mean that Puerto Rican women would have labor protections as domestic workers, because as Isales and the other reformers had noted, this labor fell out of the purview of labor standards. Miller stated that because "[t]here are no laws of any State- with one possible exception, in the State of Washington— which limit the hours of women employed in domestic service," that "in the case of this particular group of migrants what was done to improve their conditions had to be by way of the acceptance of voluntary standards and the understanding of the importance of those if there was to be a good working relationship..." In Miller's vision, the best the Women's Bureau and the other reformers could do was try to negotiate the best possible conditions for workers outside of formal legal protections.

Despite the inability of women reformers to regulate Puerto Rican contract labor or help the workers gain better working conditions, major changes brewed because of the scandal. The workers strike, the organizing of domestic workers with professional women, and calls for reform by various U.S. officials all pressured the Puerto Rican

government to intervene. In response the Puerto Rican colonial political apparatus mobilized, propelled in its own right by the populist government's desire to continuing using emigration as a means of regulating population in Puerto Rico and to stave off another scandal. The Chicago field agent from the Women's Bureau was invited to Puerto Rico to discuss the case and Miller happily reported that in the future the Women's Bureau agents would take up central roles as intermediaries between U.S employers and migrant workers like the Puerto Rican domestic workers. The Puerto Rican government enlisted these representatives to join them in creating an insular program that would regulate contract labor, using the laws of the colonial state to intervene into the lives of migrant workers while the U.S. remained disengaged. The organizing and resistance of the domestic workers, local students, and seasoned reformers like Isales and Women's Bureau agents had impacted this change. The women reformers involved in the Chicago case were quickly enlisted to Chicago precipitating a new state sponsored household worker training program that emerged within a year of the workers organizing and strike.

Institutionalizing Reform: Household Worker Labor Reform

During this period, Isales traveled to Washington to meet with Luis Muñoz Marín to discuss the labor situation. While she was in Washington, she not only talked to the senator but also to his wife about the conditions that Puerto Rican workers faced. One of the main issues that arose in their conversation with the fact of Puerto Rican workers didn't know what their rights were as US citizens. One of the plans of these

administrators was to educate Puerto Rican workers about their rights. She noted that at this time Luis Muñoz Marín was already thinking about a broader public education program along these lines on the island.⁴²⁴ In addition to working on the Chicago study Isales also produced some other documents about migration for the Puerto Rican government. She wrote (or translated) a study of social welfare systems that was reproduced in Clarence Senior's first study of Puerto Rican migration.⁴²⁵

The Chicago case became one of the justifications for the creation of a more robust system of labor regulation and migration. In response to this issue and others created by problems with Puerto Rican labor migration to the United States the already established Emigration Advisory Committee also formalized new labor policies. Towards this end they oversaw the passing in the Puerto Rican legislature of a new law in May 1947 that made it necessary for employment agencies to register their programs with the insular Department of Labor.⁴²⁶ This was a response to calls for an investigation into the experience of domestic workers and other Puerto Rican laborers in the United States, the Puerto Rican government instituted a new set of policies to regulate contract work. They decided to form a new Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor in New York, to expand the activities of the earlier Bureau of Employment and Identification, and to create other branches in the United States. Demands made by

⁴²⁴ This would later take shape as DIVEDCO, a program that Carmen Isales helped create and direct with her husband Fred Wale.

⁴²⁵ The article that Isales published was a translation of an article by Puerto Rican social worker Celestina Goodsaid. Clarence Ollson Senior, and Carmen Isales, *The Puerto Ricans of New York City* (New York: New York Office, Employment and Migration Bureau, Puerto Rico Dept. of Labor, 1948).

⁴²⁶ Michael Lapp, *Managing Migration*. Edwin Maldonado, "Contract Labor and the Origins of Puerto Rican Communities in the United States." Jorge Duany, "A Transnational Colonial Migration: Puerto Rico's Farm Labor Program." *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 84, no. 3-4 (2010): 225-251. Jorge Duany, *Blurred borders: transnational migration between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 2011).

workers, unions, and labor reformers in Puerto Rico and the U.S. resulted in the expansion of the Puerto Rican colonial government's role in the U.S. administrative apparatus regulating labor. The colonial government responded to demands for supervision of labor recruitment while it broadened the ongoing activities of its New York agency. Thus, the agency expanded due to both government plans to promote out migration and workers' and citizens' demands that labor agencies be regulated. It was partially the result of labor organizing and mobilization that had recently been institutionalized in the Puerto Rican Department of Labor. The Migration Division sought to prevent another scandal like that in Chicago—the hiring a labor organizer and reformer from the U.S. to create a new state sponsored household worker program represented a central response.⁴²⁷

Frances Phillips in Puerto Rico: Transnational Links in Household Labor Reform

On August 28, 1948, a headline that declared “Frances Phillips Leaves for Post” ran in the *New York Amsterdam News* with an accompanying image that featured a smiling group of women.⁴²⁸ They were celebrating the departure of L. Frances Phillips, the employment manager of the Metropolitan Household Offices of New York State's Department of Labor. The “popular Brooklynite” was preparing to travel to Puerto Rico

⁴²⁷ See for example: Ismael García-Colón, "Claiming Equality: Puerto Rican Farmworkers in Western New York." *Latino Studies* 6, no. 3 (2008): 269-289. For more information about the Migration Division, see: Jorge Duany, *Blurred Borders*. Michael Lapp, “Managing Migration: The Migration Division of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1948-1968” (Ph.D. Diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1991).

⁴²⁸ There were a number of articles published about Frances Phillips departure to Puerto Rico in the black press. “Frances Phillips Leaves for Post,” *New York Amsterdam News*, August 28, 1948, 30. “Honored on Eve of Leaving for Assignment in Puerto Rico,” *Afro-American*, August 28, 1948, 1. “Fete Gotham Expert Who Takes Puerto Rican Post,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 4, 1949.

Honored on Eve of Leaving for Assignment in Puerto Rico



Surrounded by gifts and well-wishers, Miss L. Frances Phillips (center, with glasses) is shown above at a farewell party given in her honor recently by workers in the New York offices of the New York State Department of Labor and members of the Puerto Rican Commission. Miss Phillips, who manages the metropolitan offices of the department's household section, is sailing for Puerto Rico this month where she will remain on a year's leave of absence from the Labor Department to do some special work with the Puerto Rican department of labor.—Hansen photo.

Figure IV.2. L. Frances Phillips on her way to Puerto Rico to work for the Puerto Rican Department of Labor to create the household worker training program. *Afro-American*, August, 28, 1948, 1.

to begin working for the Puerto Rican government. An African American woman and a seasoned labor reformer who had worked for the agency for over thirteen years, Phillips had organized a registration and placement program for household workers.⁴²⁹ The “crowning achievement of this work,” the *News* reported, “was . . . smashing the notorious ‘slave market’ conditions which existed in that area.” Her new assignment in Puerto Rico Phillips was to create “a training program and placement system designed to raise the housework ability of native maids and eventually absorb them into the houseworker field on the continent.” Officially she was given the title of assistant to the Director of the Migration and Employment Commissioner in the Puerto Rican

⁴²⁹ “Frances Phillips Leaves for Post,” 30.

Department of Labor.

The Puerto Rican government decided to hire Frances Phillips, an experienced domestic worker and labor organizer from the United States, to help develop the new system regulating contract labor.⁴³⁰ Phillips was chosen for the post because of her experience working with black_women domestic workers and her central role as a labor reformer with the New York Department of Labor. She knew the New York case, had connections with the Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor, and was known for participating in national forums discussing the reform of domestic work. Phillips was to oversee collaboration between her office, the Puerto Rican government, the Women's Bureau, and local agencies like the YWCA that helped place workers. The Puerto Rican government charged her with creating a training and placement program to professionalize Puerto Rican domestic contract labor along lines that she had developed for African American women's work. The training of women would occur in Puerto Rico before the women would be placed in homes in New York. Phillips' official title was "Assistant" to the Commissioner of Labor of Puerto Rico in the United States, Fernando Sierra Berdecia. In creating the program, Phillips also worked alongside a group of professional Puerto Rican women who were trained in home economics, education, and social work. These women made up an expanding network of reformers eager to develop

⁴³⁰ There were a number of articles published about Frances Phillips departure to Puerto Rico in the black press. "Frances Phillips Leaves for Post," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 28, 1948, 30. "Honored on Eve of Leaving for Assignment in Puerto Rico," *Afro-American*, Aug 28, 1948, 1. "Fete Gotham Expert Who Takes Puerto Rican Post," *The Chicago Defender*, Sept 4, 1949.



Figure IV.3. L. Frances Phillips, household labor reformer

the program and showcase their expertise.⁴³¹ All of the Puerto Rican instructors who developed the program had been trained in the United States. These programs allowed professional Puerto Rican women to claim new roles in state institutions that regulated the lives and labors of working class women and not merely monitor labor migration to the United States.

Phillips' work for the Puerto Rican government began with a trip to Caguas where she helped establish a new training program for household workers, grafting it onto an older home economics program. Puerto Rico already had vocational education programs within the public education system that provided training to girls and women in home

⁴³¹ On the development of home economics in Puerto Rico during this period: José Enrique Flores Ramos, "Mujer, familia y prostitución: La construcción del género bajo la hegemonía del Partido Popular Democrático, 1940-1968" (Ph.D. diss., University of Puerto Rico, 2002).

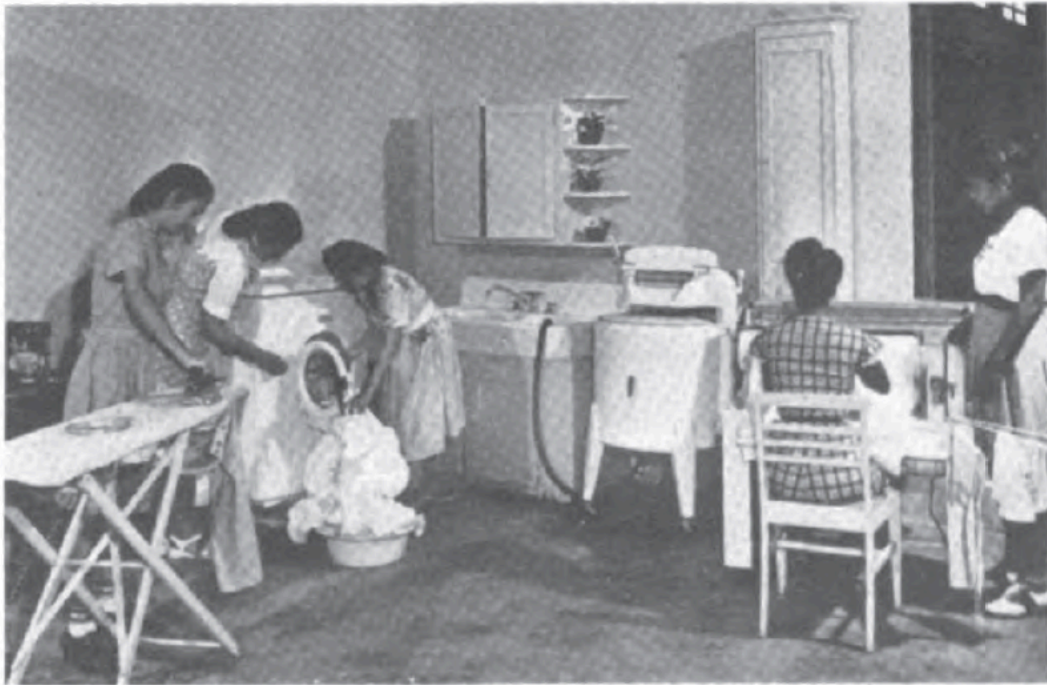
economics.⁴³² Within them students were taught U.S. ideas about domesticity and housework and instructed in how to perform caring labor. These programs drew on contemporary ideas about scientific motherhood that were also a central component of the island's ongoing modernization and development program. The household worker program, which opened in October 1947, was similar in many ways, though it specifically prepared women to migrate to jobs in the United States. It provided language classes in English and vocational classes about domestic and family life in the U.S., both of which were meant to prepare students for placement in U.S. homes. According to the African American paper, *The Chicago Defender*, it would "help mature houseworkers improve their skills and give younger workers a sounder methodical approach to housemaid's tasks."⁴³³ Students attended classes on the use of appliances like washing machines, infant and childcare, and female grooming, which included instruction in how to do one's hair and nails and how to dress for work.⁴³⁴

The formation of the household worker programs particularly opened up new roles for professional women to train working-class women in certain ideas of domesticity. The women that took up these roles in vocational education were experts, like social workers, that drew upon their own training in United States ideas of the domesticity. One article published about the program in the U.S. also reported that all of the Puerto Rican instructors in the program had been trained in United States schools. The women were

⁴³² José Enrique Flores Ramos, "Mujer, familia y prostitución."

⁴³³ "Fete Gotham Expert Who Takes Puerto Rican Post," *The Chicago Defender*, September 4, 1948, 17.

⁴³⁴ "Puerto Ricans Train for U.S. Domestic Jobs," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 8, 1947, 15.



Latest model washing machines help prepare Puerto Rican houseworkers for jobs in the United States.

Figure 1: Household work trainees. Image from: *Labor Information Bulletin* May, 1948.



Home-aid students at Caguas, P. R., school learn bed making in preparation for jobs in New York.

Figure 2: Household work trainees. Image from: *Labor Information Bulletin*, May 1948.

seen as professionals that could provide assistance in how to perform domestic tasks in a way that would modernize women at the same time as making them desirable employees in United States household. The professional women's own transnational training had specifically prepare them to take on this role in relationship to other women. However, over the course of the creation of the program this role would no longer be meant just to regulate the gendered labor of women on the island, but now became a transnational project that prepared workers for entry into United States economies. Professional Puerto Rican women also advertised that they were capable of regulating these forms of domestic labor and lay claim to a space within expanding state training programs and organizations. The program that they created overlapped with the home economics programs in high schools but was explicitly created to train women for placement in the United States. Thus, the creation of household worker programs for Puerto Rican women became just one space, among many, where professional women took up new roles in expanding state institutions that specifically cast them working with other women in tasks that were divided by gender.

Upon placement of contract workers in mainland jobs, the Puerto Rican state was concerned with providing a positive public relations campaign about labor migration, though domestic workers themselves were still largely unhappy working as domestics and many quickly abandoned their jobs. When the first group of twenty-one domestic workers traveled to Scarsdale on their labor contracts, Phillips met them at Newark Airport along with Commissioner Sierra and a group of social workers who would

become leaders of the Migration Division.⁴³⁵ Shortly after, the Puerto Rican government reported that the “Pilot Project of Training and Placement of Household Workers” was going well and that it planned to expand the program.⁴³⁶ However, the employers and workers involved in the newly regulated program were not as enthusiastic about its outcome. Domestic workers still complained that the labor conditions they faced were generally poor, and many of the women left their jobs after short periods.⁴³⁷ In the end, the government decided to suspend further professional training of domestics, and a number of planned training centers were never built. Despite the program being short-lived, the Puerto Rican government still judged the program a success because it had portrayed the state and Puerto Ricans in a good light in the United States press.

While the program only lasted for a brief time, it provided a bridge for a number of women to migrate to the United States, forging communities that would grow in U.S. cities. The fact that women did not stay in these jobs suggests how undesirable most of the live-in occupations were; this work provided women with little time off or personal freedom and left them vulnerable to exploitation by their employers. The abandonment of Puerto Rican domestic workers of live-in contract labor positions, as well as their refusal to continue to have wages deducted from their pay to cover transportation costs, were

⁴³⁵ “Household Workers from Puerto Rico Arrive in New York: First Group in Island Government’s Project Go to Scarsdale.” *Labor Information Bulletin*, May 1948. Carmen Whalen discusses the formation of this program in: Carmen Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 59. For more on the role of these reformers in the creation of the Migration Division: Michael Lapp, “Managing Migration.”

⁴³⁶ “Household Workers from Puerto Rico Arrive in New York: First Group in Island Government’s Project Go to Scarsdale” *Labor Information Bulletin*, May 1948.

⁴³⁷ Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*.

form of resistance and rejection of the conditions workers faced in the U.S.⁴³⁸ Their actions also suggest that despite attempts at regulation, the Department of Labor contract program failed to create jobs in domestic work that Puerto Rican women wanted. Instead of a sustainable form of employment, the programs actually provided a pathway for women to migrate and seek opportunities outside of state control.

Notwithstanding the spotty record of success for the Household Worker Program, the Migration Division agents who worked on the project were successful in establishing themselves as migration experts who would continue to work to regulate and organize Puerto Rican labor migration through programs that combined vocational training in Puerto Rico and assistance to workers on the mainland. The intervention of Isales in the situation in Puerto Rico sparked the concern of the Puerto Rican government over the conditions faced by domestic workers in the United States. One suggestion was that the Puerto Rican Government needed to make more services available to migrants. The Migration Division continued to place workers in jobs and help migrants with the problems that they faced in the U.S., including discrimination and lack of access to good jobs, housing, education, and social services. Even as it built other offices dedicated to employment services, agents of the Migration Division in Chicago and elsewhere worked specifically to place former domestic workers in new jobs, some of them still in domestic work for different families. In New York City one of the Puerto Rican social workers who had overseen the household worker program, Petroamerica Pagán de Colón, headed

⁴³⁸ Histories of black women domestic workers have explored alternative forms of labor resistance, see for example: Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living in, Living Out* (New York: Kodansha International, 1996). Tera W. Hunter, *To 'joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997).

a revamped New York “Employment Division.”⁴³⁹ The Migration Division kept a list of open positions in domestic work that were sent to them by potential employers who had heard that the agency provided referrals for domestic workers. The agency continued placing women as the employment agencies had done in the 1930s. However, now placement was under the direction of social workers with experience in regulating labor migration, many of whom had helped develop the domestic work training program. The following chapter explores the development of social casework by these professional women and social workers within the expanded Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor.

⁴³⁹ Petroamerica Pagán de Colón was a social worker and labor reformer that worked for the Migration Division for many years. For more on her and other Migration Division officials see: Michael Lapp, “Managing Migration.”

CHAPTER FIVE

The Migration Division in Action: Transnational Casework and the Politics of Social Security after 1948

In 1948 a Puerto Rican social worker named Flor M. Piniero published an article titled “Migrantes Puertorriquenos en Nueva York y Santa Cruz” that included a lengthy discussion of Puerto Rican migration in search of “more promising horizons.”⁴⁴⁰ Piniero began by stating that migration continued unabated despite the fact that Puerto Ricans faced “North American racial intolerance,” and an “unjust, bad intentioned and prejudiced campaign of rejection... against their compatriots who were fighting desperately to establish themselves in New York.”⁴⁴¹ After noting these racial differences, she claimed that while racism existed in Puerto Rico it did not compare to the “violence” of U.S. prejudice, and that “[i]t is in New York where perhaps for the first time the *boricua* migrant is very conscious of the color of their skin,” because “racial prejudice is not only concentrated at Puerto Ricans of color, but is extended to the entire

⁴⁴⁰ This article was published in *Bienestar Público*, a journal that was published by the Puerto Rican Department of Public Welfare, and that featured articles by Puerto Rican social workers. Flor M. Piniero, “Migrantes Puertorriquenos en Nueva York y Santa Cruz,” *Bienestar Público*, 3, no. 11, Marzo 1948.

⁴⁴¹ In the article Piniero article paid particular attention to a discussion of her perspective on how migrants experienced racial difference and prejudice, she noted that in Santa Cruz, Puerto Ricans were a “racial minority in contrast to a native population *de color*,” as juxtaposed to New York, where in “the Barrio Hispano there is a great number of Puerto Ricans that are partially or totally *de color*.”

boricua group.” According to Piniero the “undesirable situation” facing Puerto Rican migrants was created by sensationalist articles in the New York press that used “fantastical statistics” about the number of migrants traveling to the U.S. and focused on juvenile delinquency, crime, and accusations that they were “consuming city assistance funds.”

Piniero’s story shows how Puerto Rican social workers came to play central roles weaving together United States and Puerto Rican social welfare programs. She noted that her own knowledge about migration came from her experience working in the Puerto Rican community while a social work graduate student in New York. During this period she had completed a residency working in the New York Department of Public Welfare. To illustrate the impact of this formative experience working with Puerto Rican migrants she recounted an example of a case she dealt with while working at the department. One evening at the welfare center the police brought in a Puerto Rican father with his two children from Mayaguez who had been lost in the “Barrio Hispano,” wearing “tropical clothes” in the middle of the winter, and sleeping in the street. The family had bought a cheap airplane ticket after collecting money from their neighbors and set out in search of a friend in the Bronx who promised to help them settle in the city. However, the address of this friend had changed and Piniero lamented that searching for him was like “finding a needle in a haystack.” The family was temporarily put up in a hotel while the agency decided what to do.

Cases like this one became important justifications for the creation of state intervention in the lives of Puerto Rican migrants, as well as for the expansion of the role of the social worker as migrant expert. For Piniero, the family’s case was one of many

“that caused a scandal in New York City” and “demonstrated the disorientation and lack of knowledge that many migrants had” when traveling to the U.S. She was clear that migrants who experienced such a hard time when they arrived in the city were only a small group, out of a much larger community that migrated without coming to the attention of authorities and who were doing fine in the city. However, she argued that because of these types of extreme cases “there should be an agency or office that gives out information and orientation and that helps migrants to form practical and real plans, of the type that could prevent difficulties in New York.” Social workers’ central role in overseeing labor migrations had already opened up a space for them as “managers of migration” who stretched the role of the colonial state into the United States.⁴⁴² Piniero’s article also discusses how the Puerto Rican legislature had recently created a migration law mandating such an agency, which would provide orientation to Puerto Rican migrants in the United States. The other part of this legislation would provide “pre-migration” advice and vocational training (coming out of programs centered at the University of Puerto Rico) as well as redistribute migrants to other parts of the country. Perhaps the most striking statement she made, in an article that argued migration should be regulated was, “I am not trying to say that we should control these movements, because that right is a part of our citizenship: the right to free movement within United States territory.”⁴⁴³ Migration, and freedom of movement, was simultaneously described

⁴⁴² For more on the development of the Migration Division as a colonial and transnational agency see: Jorge Duany, “A Transnational Colonial Migration: Puerto Rico’s Farm Labor Program.” *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 84, no. 3-4 (2010): 225-251, Jorge Duany, *Blurred Borders Transnational Migration between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). Carmen Teresa Whalen and Victor Vázquez-Hernández, *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

⁴⁴³ “No quiero decir que se controle el movimiento, pues es este un derecho nose se concedido por nuestra ciudadanía: el derecho de la libre movilidad dentro de territorio estadounidense.” Flor Pineiro

as needing regulation and as being one of the rights available to Puerto Ricans as citizens of the United States.

Piniero's article, and the glimpses that she affords readers of her experience as a graduate student in the United States during the 1940s, are examples of how Puerto Rican social workers continued to enter roles as professional migrants in the United States. As my dissertation has already shown, the training of Puerto Rican social workers in the United States was a part of a longer history of colonial state formation on the island, wherein state officials were sent to the U.S. to get professional degrees. After the 1930s, social workers in the middle of developing New Deal social welfare agencies in Puerto Rico began traveling in larger numbers to U.S. universities. When these students arrived they were asked or expected to work on Puerto Rican topics, and while some wrote about the island, others focused their work on migrant Puerto Rican or "Spanish-speaking" communities in the cities and towns near where they studied. Social work training was largely composed of hands on work that included residencies at social service institutions, fieldwork for thesis projects, and conducting research on social science projects directed by faculty. Trainees from the island who were placed in migrant communities were given jobs as interpreters and translators of culture and were asked to document the Puerto Rican diaspora in progress. Thus, one of the peculiarities of the formation of Puerto Rican social work practices and social welfare programs on the island was that they were built by cohorts of social workers who were thinking about, experiencing, and building migration-oriented programs.

By 1948 Puerto Rican social workers had emerged as experts on both Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican migration to the United States and were poised to play an even greater

role in regulating the expansion of labor migration during World War II. In addition they were asked both to devise new ways of “integrating” Puerto Ricans into U.S. communities and to create channels of information, regulation, and casework that would link together social service agencies in the U.S. with those in Puerto Rico. Social workers entered these positions and developed bureaucratic practices that facilitated the extension of social welfare programs to Puerto Rico. Drawing on recent studies of migrant professional cultures and U.S. imperialism within the field of global American and diaspora studies, I suggest that a closer investigation of social work actions and activism might shed light on the history of Puerto Rican migration and politics in the U.S.⁴⁴⁴

Recent scholarship on professional and middle class migrations has highlighted the way that these professionals, and among them many women, played central roles in building migrant communities in the United States. Professional women navigated a shifting colonial terrain in which they worked to carve out spaces for themselves in local U.S. communities that saw them as imperial subjects. At times they saw themselves as advocates of working-class migrants, but sometimes they other times sought to distance themselves from their compatriots.⁴⁴⁵

Following social workers to the U.S., this chapter explores how in creating programs for migrants, social workers sought to expand the social citizenship of Puerto

⁴⁴⁴ Two examples of this type of investigation of migrant cultures and communities and professional and middle class communities are: Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

⁴⁴⁵ Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). Michael Lapp, “Managing Migration: The Migration Division of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1948-1968.” Thesis (Ph. D.)--Johns Hopkins University, 1990.

Ricans in the U.S. Exploring the history of professional social workers migration helps to contextualize the history of Puerto Rican state officials as they developed social work practices and agencies that regulated migration. It does so by tracing the emergence of the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor as an agency in which social workers were charged with developing new government programs addressing migrants' needs. In the first section it explores the central role that social workers played developing new colonial state policies around migration. The second section focuses on how social workers used their role in these new government agencies as a space where they could challenge prevailing discourse about Puerto Ricans as welfare dependents. In so doing, they also challenged United States social welfare agencies that denied Puerto Rican's access to social services and argued that, as United States citizens, Puerto Rican should receive the same rights as others. Building upon this organization social workers also reasserted that colonial restrictions on the extension of social policy to Puerto Rico, such as the limited coverage of the Social Security Act, had resulted in a lesser form of citizenship on the island that was creating worsening inequality. They pressed United States officials for the extension of this policy to the island, building new networks with city officials interested in restricting migration. The social workers also responded by creating new forms of transnational casework with Puerto Rican migrants within the offices of the Migration Division that responded to the needs of migrant citizens. Through this labor, social workers emerged as migration experts working on behalf of Puerto Rican citizens.

The Migration Division

After 1948 Puerto Rican social workers became central figures in organizing and managing Puerto Rican labor migration thanks to the expansion of the Migration Division. In response to problems like those posed by the migration of the Puerto Rican domestic workers to Chicago the Puerto Rican government decided to further expand the work of the New York Bureau of Employment and Migration. The expansion of its programs reflected one of the main ways that the Puerto Rican state came to act in increasingly transnational fashion as a result of the labor migrations they had sponsored.⁴⁴⁶ Headed by Manuel Cabranes, who was joined by a number of other social workers from the island, the agency was supposed to help migrant Puerto Ricans to “adjust” and “assimilate” to living in the United States. It did so through the creation a variety of different programs. The agency served at different points as an employment placement agency, consulate, and settlement house. The Migration Division was composed of a number of different subdivisions, including a Social Service Division. This section of the agency often helped migrants navigate U.S. social service institutions. Its agents worked along three tracks: initiating intervention via casework focused on solving individual problems, participating in community work, and sometimes addressing the larger economic and social reasons for migration. The Social Service Division of the Migration

⁴⁴⁶ For a discussion of the increasingly transnational reach of the Puerto Rican state see: Jorge Duany, *Blurred Borders Transnational Migration between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). Eileen Findlay, *We are Left Without a Father Here*.

Division became an important intermediary between Puerto Ricans and United States social service agencies.

While the leadership of the organization was largely male, women performed much of the work done by the Migration Division.⁴⁴⁷ They developed migration-oriented programs, managed much of the day-to-day operations of the agency, and worked closely with migrant clients through individual casework. The first two women transferred from Puerto Rico to manage work with clients were seasoned social workers Matilde Perez de Silva and Francisca Bou.⁴⁴⁸ Francisca Bou, who went by the nickname “Paquita” had been trained as a social worker in Puerto Rico and later received a degree in medical social work from Tulane University in 1941. Her expertise in medical social work also helped her to assist Puerto Rican migrants who came to the office. She was photographed numerous times for the press in her role as professional counsel to Puerto Rican labor migrants at her desk in the Migration Division headquarter. The director of the Employment Division of the agency was another trained Puerto Rican social worker, Petroamerica Pagán de Colón.⁴⁴⁹ She was chosen because of her expertise in vocational education and was specifically charged with developing programs

⁴⁴⁷ Male leadership in the field of social work was not something that was exclusively a pattern in the United States offices. In Puerto Rico as well many of the managers and directors of agencies were men that headed agencies largely composed of women. For example, Antonio Fernos Isern oversaw the Department of Health and the therefore all social welfare activities.

⁴⁴⁸ Michael Lapp, *Managing Migration: The Migration Division of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1948-1960*, 122. Francisca Bou was trained in medical social work at Tulane University in 1941. See: Report of the Commissioner of Health of Puerto Rico, 1941.

⁴⁴⁹ Petroamerica Pagán de Colón had been a high school teacher and vocational education expert before entering a new role working for the Puerto Rican government as a migration specialist. Lola Krüger Torres, *Enciclopedia grandes mujeres de Puerto Rico* (Hato Rey, P.R.: Ramallo Bros. Printing, 1975).



Figure V.1. Social worker Petroamerica Pagán de Colón with Migration Division officials. Digital Library UPR, El Mundo Collection. *El Mundo*, November 7, 1951.

to manage labor migration. However, her role went beyond her training in vocational education, as she became one of the main representatives of the Migration Division as an agency. Pagán de Colón played a central role in directing the program and linked the role of the Employment section to the growing Social Service section. In order to deal with the growing numbers of requests for assistance the Migration Division expanded its work and recruited more social workers from Puerto Rico. Numerous other social workers traveled to the United States. Most of these workers were transferred from leadership positions in Puerto Rico, but had been educated in social work programs in the United States were bilingual. These professionals were chosen to play a crucial role in representing the Puerto Rican government in the United States by linking together the

work of the insular Departments of Labor and Public Welfare in Puerto Rico with this Migration Division in the United States.

While the staff of the Migration division was small to begin with, the agency played an important role in working to develop a new relationship between the Puerto Rican government and migrant citizens in the United States. Social welfare became increasingly important for the integration of Puerto Rican migrants into United States, opening a space for Puerto Rican women in particular as advocates for Puerto Rican migrants who faced denials in local offices. In this way the social workers were on the front lines of advocating of the rights of Puerto Rican citizens through the day-to-day work that they conducted in the Migration Division. Social workers were also specifically involved in the creation and dissemination of what historian Alice O'Conner has called "poverty knowledge," they were active as researchers and scholars in social scientific studies of poverty in both Puerto Rico and the United States.⁴⁵⁰ The knowledge that was culled from these investigations was used to write state policies and impacted the lives of countless Puerto Ricans. Social workers' participation in the production of this knowledge was also framed by their evolving politics and experiences living and working in colonial and transnational communities. As social workers increasingly worked in the United States they also began to see their participation in the creation of knowledge about Puerto Rican communities and poverty as something that took on new political meanings in the diaspora.

As increasing numbers of Puerto Rican social workers moved to the United States to work as migration experts they changed the profession. While these Puerto Rican

⁴⁵⁰ Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

social workers mobilized the forms of poverty knowledge that were commonplace in social service agencies in order to articulate that Puerto Ricans were United States citizens and thus entitled to the benefits of social citizenship, they also pointed out that all Puerto Ricans were not welfare dependent.⁴⁵¹ Their main goal was to shift popular discourse about Puerto Rican migration by using this information and their professional status to speak back in response to the racist discourse about Puerto Ricans that was popular in the contemporary press and within social agencies. Puerto Rican women were involved in providing the production and distribution of information by the Puerto Rican government that was meant to counter the negative depictions of Puerto Ricans in the United States popular media and within government institutions.

The Migration Division social workers also continued to develop connections with United States social reformers through their work in the United States. These alliances proved important to the development of new discourses surrounding migrant's rights. One important alliance was with United States social work expert Mary Antoinette Cannon. Cannon was an important figure in the field of social work that had taught for years at the New York School of Social Work.⁴⁵² Cannon had mentored many of the Puerto Rican students that studied at the school since 1930. She was well known in the field for having coauthored numerous publications on the practice of social casework that

⁴⁵¹ The idea that there were experts of color that were arguing on behalf of their people is also an important part of this narrative. See for example: Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006). Maria Eugenia Coter, *Native Speakers Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, Jovita González, and the Poetics of Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).

⁴⁵² Mary Antoinette Cannon and Phillip Klein (eds) *Social Case Work: An Outline for Teaching with Annotated Case Records and Sample Course Syllabi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933). Biographical details: Sarah Gehlert and Teri Brown, *Handbook of Health Social Work*. Cannon graduate from Bryn Mawr College in 1907 and received a MA in 1916 from the New York School of Social Work.

were used in schools throughout the United States. In 1941 she had taken a year of absence to teach at the University of Puerto Rico School of Social Work as a visiting professor.⁴⁵³ While she was there she was instrumental in reworking the school of social work and wrote about her experiences in Puerto Rico.⁴⁵⁴ When she returned to New York City she became increasingly involved in social service projects targeting Puerto Rican migrants. She served as the secretary of Welfare Council of New York's Committee on Puerto Ricans in New York created in 1948.⁴⁵⁵ In this capacity, she brought her own experience in Puerto Rico working to further develop social work training and social welfare programs to bear on her work helping to develop an investigation into the experience of Puerto Rican migrants seeking social services in the United States.

After her stint at the University of Puerto Rico and as the secretary of the Welfare Council of New York, Cannon was recruited by the Puerto Rican government to help them in establishing the Social Services section of the Migration Division offices in New York. Entering a new and expanded role working for the Puerto Rican government, Cannon became an important professional collaborator with the social welfare experts of the Migration Division.⁴⁵⁶ Her status in the New York community and centrality as an expert within the social work profession helped the organization to attain more power and recognition within the New York political landscape. In this new role Cannon also

⁴⁵³ While in Puerto Rico Cannon had been hired to rework the entire school social work. See: Nilsa Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras de la profesion de trabajo social*. For more on her role see: Georgina Pastor, "Antoinette Cannon," *Revista de Servicio Social*, 3, no 8, October 1942: 2-3.

⁴⁵⁴ Mary Antoinette Cannon, "Courses in Social Work at the University of Puerto Rico," *Revista de Servicio Social*, 3, no 1, November 1941: 9.

⁴⁵⁵ Welfare Council of New York City, *Puerto Ricans in New York City: The Report of the Committee on Puerto Ricans in New York City of the Welfare Council of New York City* (New York: Arno Press, 1975).

⁴⁵⁶ Michael Lapp, *Managing Migration*, José Ramón Sánchez, *Boricua Power A Political History of Puerto Ricans in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

worked closely with the Puerto Rican social workers from the island that were recruited to develop social service programs in New York and helped oversee the expansion of the Migration Division's work throughout the 1950s. In addition to working for the agency, the Migration Division later established a scholarship program in Cannon's name that provided funds for Puerto Rican students to study social work.⁴⁵⁷

As the Migration Division expanded, the separate divisions also grew while their operations remained closely connected. The social work experts transferred clients and files between the different sections frequently working in union. The shared office made it easy to send a client from the desk of one division to that of another. The social workers' ability to work as a unit became one of the main strengths of the program because many migrants faced multiple problems in relation to housing, work, or discrimination when seeking state benefits. The case files of the Social Service section of the Migration Division reveal that clients that went to the agency seeking help with claims for assistance were often funneled by social workers towards the employment programs. The main role of the agency continued to be to provide migrants with referrals to jobs, and in this way the revamped Migration Division continued to serve a similar function to other employment agencies. However, social workers also expanded their work by providing help to clients with applications to social service programs. This frequent passing of files back and forth is reflected in the records of these agencies, as

⁴⁵⁷ The first person to receive this scholarship was a young community organizer, Antonia Pantoja, who would go on to become a central figure in the field of social services and community organization in Puerto Rico. She discusses this in her memoir, as well as how she knew Matilde de Perez, who helped get her the scholarship, because she had been a medical social worker in Puerto Rico that helped Pantoja when she was placed in a school sanatorium as a child for being at risk of contracting tuberculosis. Antonia Pantoja, *Memoir of a Visionary: Antonia Pantoja* (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 2002).

labor and social welfare were intimately intertwined in the strategies developed by social workers in both sections.

The expansion of this work opened up a larger space for Puerto Rican women at government agents and representatives in the United States branches as advocates for Puerto Rican migrants. One of the main roles of the Bureau of Employment and Migration was to develop a public relations campaign that articulated that Puerto Ricans were not a drain on city resources as had been reported in the press for decades. One of the main facts they built upon were studies conducted by the Welfare Council of New York with the collaboration of Manuel Cabranes and other Puerto Rican representatives. The work of the migration division was also closely linked to the creation of the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Puerto Rican Affairs (MACPRA) which was founded in 1949 during the mayoral campaign of O'Dwyer who hoped to win Puerto Rican votes.⁴⁵⁸ According to historian Lorrin Thomas fifteen out of forty-six members of the committee were Puerto Ricans and it was rumored that Manuel Cabranes was in charge of determining who would be in the group.⁴⁵⁹ While the agency drew criticism for not going far enough to create social change in Puerto Rican communities its results challenged the U.S. public and social service agencies to reappraise common knowledge about Puerto Ricans and welfare.

Social Workers, Poverty Knowledge and Public Relations

⁴⁵⁸ Sánchez, José Ramón. *Boricua Power A Political History of Puerto Ricans in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

⁴⁵⁹ Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*.

Through their work in New York agencies Puerto Rican social workers like Manuel Carbanes worked to challenge prevailing discourses of Puerto Rican's as welfare dependent. Social workers also participated in expanding the role of the Puerto Rican state beyond its boundaries and into the United States diasporic Puerto Rican communities forming in U.S. cities. The results of the investigation were very important to the Bureau of Employment and Migration as well as the Puerto Rican government, which sought to use this moment as an opportunity to educate the United States about Puerto Rican migrants and show that they were not like the demonizing portrayals that were circulating in the popular media.⁴⁶⁰ The committee's report stated that only 10% of Puerto Rican migrants were applying for public assistance in New York, in comparison with 4.5 percent of all New Yorkers.⁴⁶¹ The results were widely publicized in the press and numerous city representatives made statements that the "Puerto Rican problem" had been exaggerated. This was a great victory of the Puerto Rican government that ended up having wide reaching consequences. This study served as a corrective to the narratives presented during in this literature, by making an argument that all Puerto Ricans were not welfare dependent, but instead, faced similar problems of assimilation and integration as immigrant groups of previous generations. MACPRA revealed to the public the actual small numbers of Puerto Ricans that were receiving public assistance.⁴⁶² It challenged

⁴⁶⁰ Welfare Council of New York City. *Puerto Ricans in New York City: The Report of the Committee on Puerto Ricans in New York City of the Welfare Council of New York City* (New York: Arno Press, 1975).

⁴⁶¹ Welfare Council of New York City. *Puerto Ricans in New York City: The Report of the Committee on Puerto Ricans in New York City of the Welfare Council of New York City* (New York: Arno Press, 1975).

⁴⁶² Sonia Lee notes that there was only a 10% participation rate according to Raymond Hilliard. Compared to 4.2 percent of the total population. Sonia Lee, *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement: Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and the Pursuit of Racial Justice in New York City* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 56. Raymond Hilliard and Department of Welfare, *The "Puerto Rican*

New Yorkers to think of Puerto Rican migrants as recent arrivals to the city still navigating social service programs but largely migrating in search of work.

One of the main goals of both the Bureau of Employment and Migration and MACPRA was to argue for the placement of more Spanish-speaking and Puerto Rican social workers in U.S. social service organizations. One of the changes that resulted from MACPRA was the end of a three-year residency requirement for social workers, which allowed for a rapid change in the demographics of the profession. The Welfare Council investigated how many social welfare organizations in New York had hired or were employing Spanish-speaking social workers in a section in the study titled “Use of Spanish-Speaking Personnel in Social Agencies.” When they collected this information they discovered that there were thirty-eight Puerto Rican social workers working for the ninety-nine agencies that they had sent the survey. The organizations suggested that they would be interested in hiring more of this staff but that they had a hard time finding workers with the necessary training in social work. One of the Welfare Council’s responses that there should be work to recruit promising Puerto Rican students in high school and college into social work by providing scholarships for students. In the report

Problem” of the City of New York Department of Welfare; Report Submitted to Mayor William O’Dwyer. (New York, 1949).



Miss Paquita Bou, supervisor of the Labor Section, interviewing a man at the Puerto Rican Government's Migration and Employment Service at 1881 Broadway.

Figure 3: Social worker Francisca (Paquita) Bou at the Migration Division with a client.

they note that this process of providing financial assistance to students to study social work was set to begin at immediately. Manuel Cabranes was put in charge of beginning to create a scholarship program for Puerto Rican students from the island and the United States to study social work.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶³ Manuel Cabranes worked on developing the scholarship program over many years. See: New York Public Library archives of the Puerto Rican Scholarship Fund.

The Social Security Act and Puerto Rican Migration

Advocacy on behalf of Puerto Rican migrants in New York went further than challenging misrepresentations of Puerto Ricans in local media and pressuring local social welfare agencies to help Puerto Ricans rather than denying them assistance. As the Migration Division developed it also worked explicitly to expand the social citizenship rights of Puerto Ricans by demanding that Puerto Rico be included under social policies developed under the welfare state. Social workers shined a light on how colonial relations had resulted in unequal forms of citizenship that had disenfranchised Puerto Rican citizens. Moreover, they suggested that limitations on citizenship had created social inequalities that would result in increased migration as Puerto Rican citizens decided to migrate to the United States where their citizenship had more value. The other main change that both the Bureau of Employment and Migration and MACPRA pushed forward was calling for the extension of the Social Security Act of 1935 to Puerto Rico. These organizations highlighted the responsibility of the Federal Government to intervene in providing social services and support to Puerto Rican migrants in New York.

One of the main ways that social workers and Puerto Rican government officials pushed for the extension of these social policies to Puerto Rico was by educating United States officials about the Puerto Rican experience of migration. They began to target city officials in particular as a means to advocate not only for Puerto Rican migrants in the United States but also for the island as a whole. They used the migrant communities electoral power in United States party politics as a means to open up a new space for

Puerto Rican representation in the face of continued restrictions on Puerto Ricans actual representation in U.S. Congress because of its continuing colonial status. As I have shown in earlier chapters, this was not new, but rather represented another step in an ongoing struggle by social workers lasting nearly fifteen years. In Chapter two I highlighted how the child welfare provisions of the Act were extended partially in response to organizing by Puerto Ricans during the New Deal, as well as because of the advocacy of United States representatives like Vito Marcantonio who was spoke on behalf of his New York constituents. However, despite numerous petitions and delegations to the U.S. Congress, these organizers had failed to get the other titles of the act extended to the island. Still, discourses about Puerto Rican migration during World War II opened up a new opportunity to discuss the possibility of the extension of these benefits. Furthermore, the military participation of Puerto Rican soldiers in the war as well as labor migration again raised questions about Puerto Ricans' access to benefits.

The United States government had held a set of hearings about the possibility of extending the Social Security Act to Puerto Rico in 1949.⁴⁶⁴ During these hearings a number of Puerto Rican representatives had spoken out about the benefits of extending the act, or at least more of its provisions, to the island.⁴⁶⁵ Some of the main officials that gave testimony were Puerto Rican social workers from the island who highlighted the limitations of the current programs developed by the insular government. These social workers submitted reports on the status of poverty on the island and explained how the

⁴⁶⁴ United States, Congress, House, Committee on Ways and Means, and Subcommittee on Extension of Social Security to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. *Extension of Social Security to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, Eighty-first Congress, First Session.* Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1950.

⁴⁶⁵ "2 Groups to Study Islands' Problems: House Ways and Means Committee trip to PR and Virgin Islands" *New York Times*, November 11, 1949.

infrastructure that they had developed under the Department of Public Welfare since 1943 could serve as the scaffolding through which to distribute further assistance to poor families and those in need in Puerto Rico. They had developed these programs with the assistance of social service experts from the United States including members of the Social Security Council that had traveled to Puerto Rico to help them model social welfare programs on United States programs. However, despite the enthusiasm of the Puerto Rican constituents, the extension of Social Security to Puerto Rico still faced criticism by United States policymakers who didn't want to take on the cost of creating a full benefit program for the island's citizens. At the start of 1950 the result of the inquiry was still unsure.

The Social Security Act and the “Showcase of Democracy”

The Puerto Rican government and MACPRA both mobilized to get support from United States officials in cities with Puerto Rican migrants to support the passing of the Social Security Act. This was possible because one of the major shifts that occurred during the period was that in the Puerto Rican's lack of rights on the island became a central concern for policy makers in the U.S. because of the increase in migration. City officials in the United States began to see that the extension of rights and benefits to social welfare on the island as potentially reducing migration to the United States by improving conditions on the island. This change in opinion was in large part made possible by the continued efforts of Puerto Rican social workers and officials to educate the United States public about the lack of these benefits in Puerto Rico and to articulate

that the extension of these benefits could reduce migration. They did so by illustrating how the current insular programs of social welfare that had been developed under the leadership of the PPD were limited because of lack of funding. But they argued that with federal assistance they would easily be able to use the infrastructure already in place on the island to further develop programs and transform Puerto Rican society. In this way, the discourse put forward by Puerto Rican social workers during the period worked to illustrate to the U.S. public the ways in which the differential citizenship rights of Puerto Ricans based on location were impetuses to move.⁴⁶⁶ But instead of arguing that Puerto Ricans were wrong in trying to get these benefits, they argued that this need to move could be restricted if the island's citizens received the same benefits as those on the mainland.

One of the organizing tactics of the Puerto Rican government that was led by the Migration Division was the creation of educational conferences for United States policymakers in Puerto Rico. Luis Muñoz Marín invited United States officials to come to the island to learn about Puerto Rico and the modernization program he was developing. The Puerto Rican government sponsored United States mayors, social service agents, welfare administrators, and teachers to travel around Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico was also discussed as an important site for training social workers from other Latin American countries, as a part of the Good Neighbor Policy.⁴⁶⁷ Officials traveled to Puerto Rico and Cabranes was there to meet them on the island to report on the “inadequacies of the

⁴⁶⁶ See for example: “Puerto Rico Left Out,” *New York Times*, July 18, 1950. “Puerto Rican Security,” *The Washington Post*, July 18, 1950.

⁴⁶⁷ See for example: Ramon Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). In the press: “Social Work Held Key to Democracy: Aim to Trained Group is Sole Way to Ease Problems of Needy People, Class Hears: Point 4 Program Hailed,” *New York Times*, October 5, 1950.

island's relief program" and along with others discussed "easing the economic pressure on migration from Puerto Rico." Among other topics, Cabranes suggested "that Puerto Rico be used as a demonstration and training area for United States technicians who later would help the underdeveloped areas of the world under President Truman's Point Four program."⁴⁶⁸ The island was becoming an important training ground for social workers from Latin American and other areas of the world, as documented by the circulation of social workers and professionals between Puerto Rico and other regions in its social work journals. The travels of United States officials to Puerto Rico were often overseen by social workers from the Migration Division and local agencies who developed educational programs that introduced these officials to Puerto Rico and the modernization projects being developed by the Popular Democratic Party.

The most high-ranking leaders in the field of social worker in Puerto Rico, including Emma Purcell, Felicidad Catala, Celia Bunker, and Mercedes Velez de Perez, were involved in creating these programs on the island. Even the retired social work leader Beatriz Lassalle del Valle participated in some of these activities, discussing the origins of social welfare in Puerto Rico with the visitors.⁴⁶⁹ Organizing these events became a transnational project in educating the United States government about Puerto Rico and the migrants on the mainland. Participants not only were engaged in seminar discussions, watched presentations, and met with Puerto Rican officials, but also were sometimes placed in home stays with Puerto Rican families and conducted short

⁴⁶⁸ "Ewing Off to Map Puerto Rican Aid: Administrators to Plan Island's Social Security as Congress Approval Is Awaited," *New York Times*, April 25, 1950, 19.

⁴⁶⁹ See material about earlier conferences referenced in: "Conclusions of the Migration Conference. Held in San Juan, Puerto Rico, March 1-7, 1953," Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Department of Labor (New York, 1953).

fieldwork stays in poor Puerto Rican neighborhoods. The programs were largely successful in providing a context for Puerto Rican to United States officials, more than that they showed them the poverty that faced many island citizens. Social workers also introduced these visitors to the limited amount of assistance that they were able to distribute to clients because of the restrictions on social policy to Puerto Rico. The social workers also shared with them stories about the long history of social workers attempts to get more extensive coverage under the Social Security Act.⁴⁷⁰

The colonial contours of the U.S. social welfare state and the limitations that it posed for Puerto Ricans became the subject of numerous articles in United States newspapers during this period. These discourses were welcomed by city officials in New York and other United States cities who still believed that Puerto Ricans were providing a drain on local resources.⁴⁷¹ For example, one article on MACPRA noted the group sought the “liberalization of the Federal Social Security Law” which they stated, “forbids use of Federal grants-in-aid for the aged, the blind, and dependent children in Puerto Rico.”⁴⁷² The article goes on to describe how “Without Federal aid from the continent, relief allotments in Puerto Rico are now limited to \$7.50 a month per family, regardless of its size.” The funding cap, so often bemoaned by social workers on the island in their work

⁴⁷⁰ *Bienestar Público* published an edition dedicated to articles about the need to extend the Social Security Act in 1949 that included some of the arguments that social workers and social reformers were making during the period: See for example: Sol Luis Descartes “Capacidad economica de Puerto Rico para la seguridad social,” *Bienestar Público* 4, no 16, June 1949, 2. Raul Muñoz, “Instrumentacion de los seguros sociales en Puerto Rico” 4, no 15, March 1949, 30.

⁴⁷¹ The U.S. city officials also thought that by traveling to Puerto Rico they could inform those on the island that they shouldn’t migrate to the United States because they would still face hard conditions. See for example: “City No Bonanza- Hilliard Warns: Welfare Chief, in Puerto Rico, Declares New York Streets ‘Are Not Paved in Gold’” *New York Times*, August 11, 1950.

⁴⁷² “Services Extended for Puerto Ricans: City Departments Announce More Aid at Meeting of Mayor’s Committee” *New York Times*, October 5, 1949.

to petition Congress was described, and then compared to what was available in New York. The article stated “the average in New York City for all assistance payments in August was \$81.31 per case, and \$40.73 per individual.”

Advocates began to argue that it was the federal government’s responsibility to take action by addressing the concerns of the Puerto Rican government and providing access to Social Security to Puerto Ricans on the island. An article published in the *New York Times* about MACPRA in 1950 stated, “[all] the members of the committee headed by Mr. Hilliard had recommended passage of the Social Security provisions affecting Puerto Rico...” According to the article a broad coalition of New Yorkers that included “leaders of the Puerto Rican community here as well as religious and civic leaders interested in Puerto Rican affairs and the heads of all the city’s departments affected by the recent large immigration of Puerto Rican to this city...” were all in agreement about the immediate necessity to pressure the federal government to create this change. The article quoted Mayor O’Dwyer as adamantly stating that “[it] would be manifestly unfair for Congress to refuse this aid both to Puerto Rico and to New York City...” and that “[f]ailure to extend such equal treatment to Puerto Rico would be considered unfair by Puerto Ricans.”⁴⁷³ Such a statement by a U.S. city official about the extension of the Social Security Act to Puerto Rico only a few years before would have seemed impossible to the social workers that had lobbied Congress.

But the tide had shifted in their favor and that year an entire delegation of U.S. city representatives lobbied the U.S. Congress for the passage of the Social Security Act to Puerto Rico. These activities resulted in startling transformations in the island’s social

⁴⁷³ “Puerto Rican Help Urged by O’Dwyer: Telegrams to Congress Group Call for Social Security Aid for People of Puerto Rico” *New York Times*, July 12, 1950, 27.

welfare status. In 1950, largely at the urging of U.S. city administrators in New York and Chicago, a significant, while still restricted, portion of the Social Security Act was extended to Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican government had established a system of social welfare and social security that although limited by colonial restrictions, had served to change the relationship of the island to the U.S. by weaving together social welfare programs. As this chapter illustrated, the bureaucratic work of administering these programs was done by Puerto Rican reformers, many of whom were social workers that had helped create the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican government's Department of Labor. At the same time as social workers oversaw the Puerto Rican government's sponsorship and oversight on a massive labor migration to the United States, they were also charged with creating new forms of social services with a growing population of migrants in need. They built the Migration Division, which represented a new and more robust form of inter-agency services that linked together the labors of social workers in Puerto Rico with those in U.S. offices. These forms of casework were the result of a long history of social workers doing casework with migrant clients, which this chapter has traced.



Figure V.3.: Social worker Blanca Canales after her arrest in October 1950. Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras de la Profesion de Trabajo Social*. Original published in *Claridad*, August 8, 1996.

Radical Social Work Alternatives: Social Workers and the Struggle for Puerto Rican Independence

Not all social workers were happy with the way that social welfare policies were being developed as a part of larger political project to ensure a continued colonial relationship between the island and the United States. At the same time that the Puerto Rican government worked to consolidate a more intertwined relationship between United States and Puerto Rican welfare programs. Some Puerto Rican social workers also proposed alternative visions of the island's future at the same time as they worked for the

government. Many of the nationalist social workers that help develop social welfare programs on the island simultaneously advocated for the extension of the Social Security act at the same time as working towards the future independence of the Island. Among the social workers were some of the founders of social work including Carmen Rivera de Alvarado and Blanca Canales, who had helped develop some of the first social welfare programs on the island.⁴⁷⁴ These women had also both been active in promoting the extension of more social welfare rights and benefits to Puerto Rican citizens, working pragmatically to create a social welfare system that would allow Puerto Ricans access to social services and at the same time advancing alternative political visions for Puerto Rico.

They continued to organize despite the fact that there was an ongoing purge of independence supporters within government institutions under the leadership of the Popular Democratic Party. These political developments opened up a new space for Puerto Rican women to once again advocate on behalf of Puerto Rican independence. In particular, social workers Blanca Canales and Isabel Rosado played central role in organizing during this critical moment in history Puerto Rico.⁴⁷⁵ This became particularly difficult for them after the 1948 passage of the *Ley de la Mordaza*, a gag law that made it illegal for Puerto Rican citizens to criticize the government and to speak out in favor of independence. However, despite facing this crackdown on independence organizing, Puerto Rican nationalists, among them social workers, continued to organize and plan

⁴⁷⁴ For more on the lives of these nationalist social workers see: Nilsa Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras de la Profesión de Trabajo Social*. Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, *Lucha y visión de Puerto Rico libre* (Río Piedras, P.R.: T. Rivera de Ríos, 1986). Blanca Canales, *La constitución es la revolución* (San Juan, P.R.: Comité de Estudios, Congreso Nacional Hostosiano, 1997).

⁴⁷⁵ Blanca Canales, *La constitución es la revolución*.

actions. This mobilization would come to head in 1950 with the passage of Public Law 600, which authorized Puerto Rico to create its own constitution but shored up the continued colonial relationship between the island and the United States. In response, nationalist independence supporters led by Pedro Albizu Campos began developing plans for a coordinated action around the island to challenge United States authority and proclaim a free Puerto Rico.⁴⁷⁶

In 1950, in response to the reinforcement of a continued colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, the independence party launched a series of armed actions against the United States government. In the towns of Jayuya, Arecibo, Mayaguez, and Naranjito One of the main actions was led by social worker Blanca Canales, who took up arms alongside a group of other nationalist supporters and took control of her hometown of Jayuya. She was arrested along with other nationalist leaders, many of them women, and sent to jail. The press in reporting upon her arrest showed images of a small middle aged women surrounded by police, who interrogated her about the organization of the coordinated protests. The nationalist received long jail sentences for their offences, and because these were federal offenses, many were transferred to the United States to serve jail time. The Puerto Rican government also arrested independence leader Pedro Albizu Campos and sentenced him to a longer prison term.

For Blanca Canales the route to a better future for Puerto Rico would be achieved through more radical political action. As a social worker and political organizer that supported the independence of Puerto Rico, Blanca Canales worked closely with Pedro Ablizu Campos and other nationalists throughout the 1940s and early 1950s. She was one

⁴⁷⁶ César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

of a larger group of nationalist women that played central roles in political actions at the time. Canales used her position traveling around the island developing social welfare programs as a space to advocate for the nationalist cause.⁴⁷⁷ Scholars have begun to document the crucial role that these women played as political activists within the nationalist movement, despite the fact that histories of these women's sacrifices remains largely missing from earlier histories of independence organizing in Puerto Rico. For the social workers that supported the independence of Puerto Rico 1940s and early 1950s marked a moment of increased political mobilization. In 1952 the Estado Libre Asociado was formally created and the PPD won a decisive victory in the Puerto Rican polls. Shortly afterwards in 1954 a group of independence supporters led by nationalist Lolita Lebron attacked the U.S. House of Representatives, wounding five congressmen, and demanding that Puerto Rico be liberated from United States colonial rule. In response Pedro Albizu Campos was arrested again and sent to federal prison in Atlanta.

Dwelling on the social workers who worked towards pragmatic changes in the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States while at the same time participating in larger political movements that sought the decolonization of Puerto Rico, offers us an important to think about the ways these women worked simultaneously to build state institutions as agents of the state— even as they engaged in radical political actions that challenged colonial authority and limited the hegemony of the PPD. Some women who were working as state agents in social welfare programs were also involved in campaigns to overthrow the United States government on the island. While this was not the majority of the social workers that were working for the PPD government, these

⁴⁷⁷ Nilsa Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras de la Profesion de Trabajo Social*. Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, *Lucha y visión de Puerto Rico libre*. Blanca Canales, *La constitución es la revolución*.

women were still an important force within the nationalist party. They used the political leverage that they created through the professionalization of social work to work towards radical political goals, making the field of social work an important space for women's political organizing. Interestingly, this was despite the fact that the Popular Democratic Party routinely attempted to purge the government institutions from nationalist supporters. It seems that one of the main holdouts of radical political vision within the Puerto Rican state was within professional programs that employed women that included social welfare.

The social workers organizing during this period became increasingly transnational as they built networks with other radical organizers and activists in the United States. In particular, New York City was a space where many of the radical ideas of the Puerto Rican nationalist party were able to flourish and develop. Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, in particular, traveled extensively in the United States as well as in other areas of Latin America in order to promote the agenda of her political party and to advocate for the independence and decolonization of Puerto Rico. A leader in her field, she also worked extensively in the United States including as a visiting scholar in a number of social welfare programs. It was through her work in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s that she began also to articulate a new form of social work practice that was focused specifically on ideas of decolonization. Borrowing from social work organizing and activism in other areas of Latin America, schools around the world in decolonization struggles—she imagined the social worker as being a leader in the political transformation of colonial nations. Her work resulted in the publication of a number of books that

dealt specifically with the development of social work as a decolonial practice.⁴⁷⁸ The radical ideas of these social workers circulated to the United States and informed the development of new practices of social work in upcoming years.

The 1950s: Expanding the Migration Division and Developing Transnational Casework

After 1951, when the agency had become the Migration Division of the Department of Labor more social workers were recruited by the Puerto Rican government. Along with other changes to the agency structure the agency was given a new director, Clarence Senior, The United States social scientist working with the PPD. Manuel Cabranes, the social worker that it helped establish the new role of the agency, was then only in charge of the New York office. Frustrated by this demotion, Cabranes

⁴⁷⁸ Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, *El trabajo social: una profesión en la encrucijada* (San Juan, PR; Asociacion Nacional de Trabajadores Sociales de Puerto Rico, 1973).



Figure V.4. Joseph Monserrat, Director of the New York Migration Division Office.

left the agency in 1951 to work for the New York Department of Welfare full-time. Senior chose another social worker, Joseph Monserrat to fill the position. Monserrat came to the United States when he was three years old and had been raised in a foster home in New York. As a young man he studied social science at Columbia University.⁴⁷⁹ He drew upon his own experiences as Puerto Rican in the United States, in particular experiences of racial discrimination, in his own writings and discussions. Before being hired by the Migration Division he had worked at a number of settlement houses with Puerto Rican youth. Like Cabranes, he was an attractive candidate because of his experience working in New York City. Monserrat spoke openly about how the migration

⁴⁷⁹ There is a short biography in the Joseph Monserrat papers at the Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. See also: Wolfgang Saxon, "Joseph Monserrat, 84, Leader in Efforts to Unify Latinos," *New York Times*, November, 19, 2005.

division served as a space where professionals, both Puerto Rican and their allies, were in a position to actively challenge the way that Puerto Ricans were depicted in popular discourse. It was the fluency of Puerto Rican social workers in discussing social services policy that allowed them to help Puerto Rican migrants in New York City.

Within the Migration Division social workers began developing new forms of transnational social work with migrant clients. The casework conducted with Puerto Rican migrants was specifically seen as a new type of practice, something that would provide services to the community that were not already available. Petroamerica Pagán de Colón also emphasized developing new forms of casework to meet the need of Puerto Rican migrants, claiming, “Since our aim is to assist and supplement community agencies in their work, rather than to duplicate the work of any existing agency, our approach is always a flexible one and our functions are developed in collaboration with local community agencies.”⁴⁸⁰ The flexible strategies developed by the Migration Division in relation to casework were innovated by social workers in their city offices.

The agencies assistance was requested in a variety of different ways depending on the particular case. These claims included assistance with housing complaints, health care, childcare, and problems dealing with transnational family separation, abuse, discrimination, and mistreatment in U.S. agencies. Sometimes multiple issues were entangled in one case, as in the case of a woman’s application from 1948.

Mrs. Napp, Intake Supervisor, Welfare 40, telephoned to ask our assistance in finding a room or apartment for Mrs. X and her 2 children could live. Mrs. X. has been sheltered since January 13 after she was put out of her friend's home. In

⁴⁸⁰ Petroamerica Pagán de Colón, “Migration Trends,” Address before the First Annual Conference of Education of New Yorkers of Puerto Rican Origin, Hunter College, May 9, 1959.

November 1947 Mrs. X. came to NY to work at the request of a friend who claimed she would care for the children while Mrs. X worked during the day. Through letters this arrangement was made and Mrs. X came to NY to find she was living in an apartment with 8 other people. The landlady of her friend, found the apartment too crowded and ordered Mrs. X and her 2 children out of the house. Mrs. X having no place to live, wandered around the city, sleeping in subways and parks. She was picked up by the local authorities and taken to the Municipal Lodging House where she has been ever since because DW (Department of Welfare) has been unable to find a place for her to live...⁴⁸¹

This case shows how sometimes referrals came from social service agencies looking for assistance with particular cases. It also reveals how migrants housing, work, and child care needs were intertwined in these files. Other clients were referred from public schools and other institutions. Social workers also sometimes referred cases like this one to private social service agencies in the community. In particular, many cases were referred Casita María, a Catholic social service agency and settlement house for Puerto Rican that was co-founded by Sister Carmelita Bonilla.⁴⁸² Migration Division officials developed relationships with these private organizations in order to find alternative solutions for Puerto Rican families.

When migrants made their own way to the offices of the agency itself, they were given intake interviews by social workers that were similar to the practices social worker had already developed in island agencies. Often migrants needed basic help with problems they faced with U.S. government agencies or general information about what social services were available to them. The casework that resulted from these interviews often resulted in the Migration Division social workers beginning correspondences on

⁴⁸¹ Case File 0084—5/3/48 – Name Changed. (OGPRUS Social Service Records).

⁴⁸² Discussed in Lorrin Thomas *Puerto Rican Citizen*, 93. Virginia Sanchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 112.

clients behalf with agents in U.S. departments of health, welfare, housing, or the judicial system. In a similar case dealing with the difficulty a woman faced applying for assistance, this type of casework process is outlined in the following case.

Mrs. Z after losing her job and being unable to secure another one applied for Aid to Dependent Children. Her application was rejected on 4/23/51 at Non Residence Welfare Center because she was unable to explain how she had managed since she lost her job in November 1950. According to Mrs. Z she has been helped by friends with food and occasionally with money in exchange for help with household chores and laundry. She owes three months rent and has been threatened with eviction. Mrs. Z feels that she can't leave her son alone while she goes to work and has no one to look after him. In her previous place of employment she used to take the child with her and keep him with her while she was working but she will not be allowed to do this in any other place. She also told (the) worker that Mr. Y (former boss) has refused to give her a statement of her period of employment and earnings because he does not have a license to operate his business. Worker advised Mrs. X to reapply at the Welfare Center and get a statement from all the persons that have been helping her as to the fact that they have been contributing towards her support. A letter of introduction was given to her from the DW."

This case is one of many that shows how social workers often provided documentation for migrants, such as letters explaining the individual's case, to the United States social workers. This was particularly necessary when migrants did not speak English and were trying to navigate complicated bureaucratic structures. The agency increasingly provided clients with translators and translations, information about social service programs, advice on denials of benefits, information and documentation necessary for applications.

Many of the cases began with the Migration Division seeking background information about clients in order to determine eligibility for benefits. Social workers efforts to mediate between United States agencies and migrants also served to introduce Puerto Ricans and the existence of the Puerto Rican colonial state, to social service

agents in the United States. When United States agencies contacted them they were usually inquiring for this type of background information. The social workers sometimes were able to immediately provide basic information about eligibility by ensuring officials that Puerto Ricans could receive help. One of the main issues that migrants faced were residency requirements for certain social services that required that individuals live in the place of application for between one or two years before application was allowed. The Migration Division was often called upon to verify how long migrants had been in the United States by using their own network of information, which included contacting officials and family members back on the island about when migrants had left the island.

Social workers also investigated cases of missing people, corresponded with institutions like prisons and mental institutions, and continued to assist contract laborers who ended up in exploitative work situations. They dealt with numerous cases of spousal abandonment and applications for assistance with care for children. Many of these cases were initiated by women on the island and in the United States who sought assistance locating fathers or acquiring documents stating they were not single mothers so they could apply for benefits. However, there were also cases made by fathers, grandmothers, and other relatives trying to locate mothers that had left from the United States to work. Sometimes these family members sought information about these women or documents that would allow them to provide care for children. Sometimes women left for the United States with their children to escape violence and abuse. In one such case, a husband in Puerto Rico contacted the Migration Division trying to locate his wife who had moved to

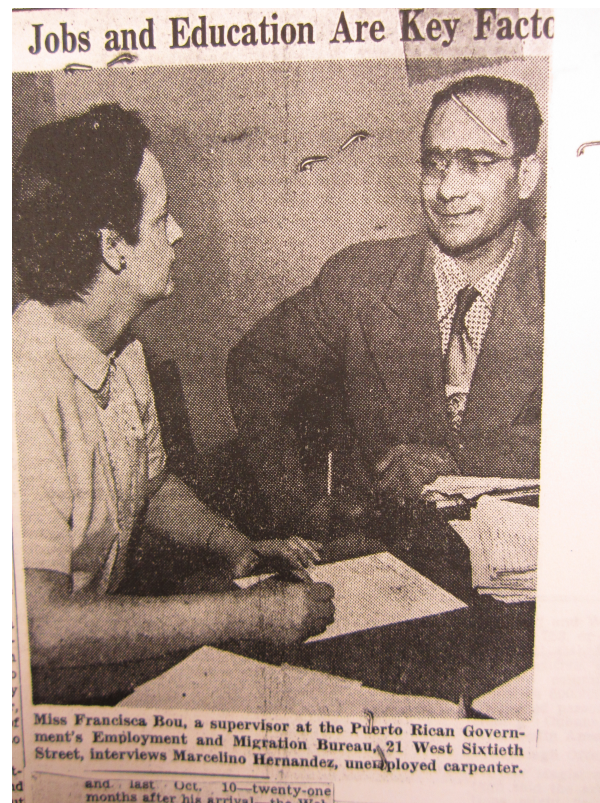


Figure V.5. Francisca Bou at the Migration Division.

New York with their two children without informing him ahead of time. He wrote to ask that they locate her and remind her of her “maternal responsibility,” encouraging her to return rather than living in a disreputable place with the children.⁴⁸³ The man succeeded in getting social workers in the United States to visit the woman in her new home. When a social worker interviewed her she told them that she had left because her husband he was jealous and violent, never letting her leave the house and often threatening to kill her. The social workers wrote to both the husband and social workers in Puerto Rico informing them that the wife would not be returning; she was living in a nice apartment in New York with family members and the children were being properly cared for in the

⁴⁸³ OGPRUS Records, Case File 2334.

United States. Stories like these illustrate the changing networks and patterns of care that resulted from increased displacement and transnational lifestyles surface again and again in social workers files.

The caseworkers approached migrants' cases by building new networks of information, sometimes because information was requested by United States agencies, and at other times because claims were being initiated by clients residing in Puerto Rico. For example, a women living on the island often needed documentation of the financial condition of her children's father, information that could only be collected in the United States. In one such case, a social worker from Puerto Rico had written to the Department of Welfare in the United States seeking information about a client.

Mr. Goldstein (Department of Welfare) explained that the Bureau had received a letter from the Department of Health Division of Public Welfare in Santurce, Puerto Rico, requesting a report about Mr. Y's economic situation. The letter stated that Mr. Y's common law wife had applied for assistance there for herself and her two children, (Boy), Jr and (Girl). Also that Mr. Y's wife explained that they had separated because Mr. Y was a drunkard. The court ordered Mr. Y to give \$6 for the support of his 2 children. Mr. Y has not done so. At the beginning he had supported his children but later came to NYC with a passage paid by his wife...⁴⁸⁴

The administration of social services in Puerto Rico placed new demands on social service agencies in the United States to become involved in case files that dealt with migrants in the United States. The displacement and large scale labor migration happening in Puerto Rico created new situations for Puerto Rican families that demanded attention from state officials. Circulation of information about clients between the island and mainland became increasingly important in dealing with these claims.

⁴⁸⁴ OGPRUS Records, Case File 0091.

Social workers responded to these new situations by developing new forms of transnational casework that stretched social welfare practices between Puerto Rico and the United States. This was accomplished through the development of a robust division of Inter-Agency Services that circulated clients' information between the island and mainland. The inter-agency services program was run by social worker Aurora G. Baralt out of the San Juan offices, and it utilized the services of a variety of social workers on the island. The agency had already worked to link together information about Puerto Ricans as the welfare state developed in the 1930s and 40s, creating a means to send information about internal migrants back and forth between the expanding networks of public welfare clinics around the island. They had mastered the bureaucratic circulation of information and files on the island and now these practices extended to the United States. The Migration Division social workers corresponded with interagency services about numerous cases, requesting that all pertaining information about clients be mailed to them in the United States. Social workers in Puerto Rico were charged with collecting this data and often were asked to conduct fieldwork or interviews with family members of clients in their homes. Island social workers in turn began writing to the Migration Division for information about their clients on the island. Investigations became collaborations between social workers in different locations. Bundles of documents about clients were mailed from local offices in Puerto Rico to New York, Chicago, and other US cities.

One of the main issues that surfaced in the casework conducted by Migration Division social workers was clients need for assistance with transportation costs. Migrants of sought help financing return trips to the island for themselves or other family

members. Sometimes funding for these journeys was provided by social service agencies, but often these appeals were denied. As demand for help with transportation costs increased in the 1950s and the agency decided to create a separate branch of casework dedicated exclusively to return migration.⁴⁸⁵ The agency agreed to assist some of the most deserving cases with transportation costs back to the island when funds were available. Social workers conducted interviews with applicants for these programs, collecting information about the reasons that applicants wanted to return and writing up notes about whether these cases were advisable. One of the determining factors they considered was whether the client had access to financial support back on the island. In order to find out they wrote to inter-agency services and had a social worker in Puerto Rico go to the house of the family members in Puerto Rico and determine if there was a proper place for the applicant to stay. They interviewed family members on the island about their financial status and sent this information back to the Migration Division. The agency only approved a very small amount of applicants in cases where financial support awaited the applicant back on the island.

Regulating Caring Labor: Professional Women and Clients

During the 1950s in Chicago there was a much larger demand for the services of the Migration Division than the agency was able to provide. In the branches monthly reports they documented how the small group of social workers struggled to keep up with

⁴⁸⁵ OGPRUS records, Return Migration files.



Figure V.6. Social worker at the Migration Division.

their caseloads and were often unable to do follow-up work on cases.⁴⁸⁶ According to the Social Services branch,

“In every case we have been using the resources of the community and carry the case only until the family establishes a good relation with the other agency and is able to help themselves It has been our experience that our clients do need much help towards providing eligibility and understanding services and policy of the different social agencies.”⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁶ Midwest Office, Monthly Report, Director, 1954. (Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, OGPRUS Migration Division box 2262, folder 1).

⁴⁸⁷ Chicago Office Report, March 1954.

This department was still trying to deal with the failure of the domestic worker labor program, and social worker Isabel Collazo, who was in charge of the department, wrote that they were spending the majority of their resources trying to find alternative placements for the domestic workers. Although many women requested employment in factories or other occupations, signaling declining interest in care work positions that could be time-intensive, low-paid, and exploitative.

The New York office continued to place many of the women who came to the agency in search of employment in domestic work positions through their “Household Worker” program. This was different from the domestic worker training programs in that the agency placed these household workers in the homes of other clients, paying them. The social workers in the Social Service section also began funneling women who sought help in applying for public assistance towards the household worker program.⁴⁸⁸ In this way, the agency mirrored other United States programs of the time that increasingly encouraged women who applied for assistance to participate in vocational training programs in low-paid caring labor. As Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein have documented, the privatization of the welfare state and care work that occurred in the 1950s resulted in the Bureau of Public Assistance increasingly sponsoring programs that trained welfare recipients, or potential applicants, in “Homemaker Service” programs.⁴⁸⁹ These workers were paid to provide other public assistance recipients cheap in-home care. This process

⁴⁸⁸ Records of the Household Employment Section, OGPRUS. The case file records of the Migration Division reveal notes in the files of social service applicants by social workers who mention forwarding along applicants to the employment section to be considered for the household worker program.

⁴⁸⁹ Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein. *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). For more on these types of programs and policies see: Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002). Evelyn Nakano Glenn. *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010).

sped up after the passing of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1949 that increasingly supported training women in feminized care positions taking care of other poor people. These programs were particularly targeted at African American women but increasingly included Puerto Rican women.⁴⁹⁰ They placed poor women into care work positions where they were actually employed by the welfare state.

Not all of the domestic work positions overseen by the Migration Division were sponsored through this program, but many of the positions that were listed by the agency were actually in Puerto Rican households.⁴⁹¹ The job listings contain large numbers of requests from individuals with Spanish surnames, as well as requests that state that the applicant does not need to speak English. The agency kept a list of open positions that were forwarded along to them by people seeking care workers. There were also numerous listings for positions working for working mothers who needed childcare as well as positions taking care of the disabled, sick and elderly people. Job requests display subtle variations in vocabulary: employers asked live-in and live-out assistance from a “babysitter,” or “mothers helper” or “nursemaid.” Through requests like these, the social workers of the Migration Division came to broker the care work needed to sustain the migrant community. Growing numbers of Puerto Rican women and girls were placed in positions as domestic workers throughout the 1950s and afterwards.

⁴⁹⁰ Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein, *Caring for America*.

⁴⁹¹ OGPRUS-- Job Orders: Household workers, 1-7 1950, 1956-57 Box 1826

The Migration Division also continued to facilitate the migration of Puerto Rican social workers to the United States. It recruited and placed social workers through the Employment Services agency alongside other types of professional workers. There were large numbers of open positions for bilingual social workers in United States agencies that largely went unfilled because there was a lack of applicants.⁴⁹² The agency sought to increase the number of Puerto Rican social workers in these agencies in order to improve services to migrants. These “native” social workers sought to promote “integration” and change practices within U.S. agencies. They were charged both with making migrants legible to these agencies and with literally and conceptually interpreting U.S. institutions for their clients. As bilingual professionals, they navigated between different languages and governments as translators of state structures. The social mobility available to social workers also diversified the field, as growing numbers of students applied for scholarship programs in social work education programs in Puerto Rico and the United States. The placement of these workers was also something that became a more pressing political issue and reality with increasing social pressure from United States welfare agencies.

Social workers were involved in many different debates over the meaning of their profession within the United States. In particular, they participated in conversations with US based social workers and other parties who saw Puerto Rican migrants as potential drains on the social services of United States cities. They were invested in trying to balance these narratives about migrants through challenging agencies that saw migrants through a negative lens from the beginning to reconsider there preconceived notions. They were on the front lines of dealing with the way that Puerto Rican migrants were

⁴⁹² OGPRUS—Job Orders. Order forms included those for social workers in listings for professional workers.

being treated within state agencies. They were often discriminated against themselves for being Puerto Rican, despite the status that they had received in Puerto Rico for being members of an emerging middle class. Their status was much more precarious in the United States, where they were located in a different position within social hierarchies of race and class.

The number of cases undertaken by social workers employed by the agencies grew, and agents worked to develop new forms of casework in response to the needs of migrants. These programs changed the discourse about migration, slowly showing city officials in the United States that Puerto Ricans were not foreigners that could be deported or restricted from social service programs simply on the basis of not having citizenship. In essence, in Puerto Ricans attempts to make claims to social services on the mainland they tested the rights and benefits of United States citizenship. The Migration Division agents intervened in cases to back up these claims, providing proof that they were legitimate. While discrimination still occurred for other reasons, such as the framing of Puerto Rican as potential dependents, these debates did begin to rework the discussion of Puerto Ricans access to social services in the U.S.

Social workers efforts had resulted in the institutionalization of new forms of social work practice within the Migration Division. The creation of this new agency, with its centrality of integrating migrants through social work, and was the result of social processes and political actions that these social workers were involved in. The epilogue will explore how the leadership and believed that distancing Puerto Ricans from previous discourses of welfare would be better serve the group. He declined a spot on MACPRA in 1954 and instead focused his efforts on supporting other community-oriented

initiatives and opening up the offices of the Migration Division to many different community groups to organize for access to housing, education, and services. Through this platform a whole new host of social services and social justice orientation programs were developed.

CONCLUSION

From Transnational Casework to Community Organizing: The Transformation of Puerto Rican Social Work after 1950

“Feminine Leadership” and Puerto Rican Women’s Activism

On May 2nd, 1989 Puerto Rican civil rights leader Antonia Pantoja gave a speech at Hunter College that she titled “Voces de Mujeres: Puerto Rican Women and Community Development in New York.”⁴⁹³ In the brilliant and searing commentary on the history of Puerto Rican political organizing in New York Pantoja took scholars and political organizations to task for not remembering the historical contribution of Puerto Rican women to social justice and civil rights work in the United States. She began by stating that she spoke about a “the group of Puerto Rican women who held leadership in New York City during the years 1945- 1960s,” who according to Pantoja “forged an institutional leadership base that has been obliterated and lost to our current generation and to those who will come after.” She notes that throughout this period the “leadership of the Puerto Rican community was heavily feminine” and that “[t]his feminine leadership acted with a distinct style and philosophy.” Pantoja notes that these women’s work was centered on community organization and working collaboratively to work

⁴⁹³ Antonia Pantoja, “Voces de Mujeres: Puerto Rican Women and Community Development in New York City,” unpublished speech originally given at Hunter College May 2, 1989 as a part of the Bella Abzug Conference Series. Located in the Antonia Pantoja papers of the Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Hunter College, City University of New York.

towards social justice and change in their communities. However, despite the centrality of women's activism in Puerto Rican political history, Pantoja pointedly noted that "[t]he erasing of the footsteps of Puerto Rican New York women in the story of Puerto Rican New Yorkers and their struggle to achieve social and economic justice has been blatantly and effectively done by writers and researchers who have written and published work on Puerto Ricans."

Antonia Pantoja gave an example of this erasure within contemporary narratives of the history of ASPIRA, the educational organization she helped found in New York, noting that histories of the group had omitted women's leadership in the organization. She described how histories of the organization had described ASPIRA as a group developed by male elites that were only interested in grooming another elite generation of male leaders to follow in their footsteps. For Pantoja, the history of the organization was radically different and represented a narrative of the effectiveness of women's political organization for educational reform and social change. She saw the historical development of these narratives as a deliberate silencing of women's contributions that could only be rectified by recovering and documenting the central role that women had played as political actors in New York. Moreover, she argued that in learning from this "feminine leadership" and the tactics they developed, both in earlier generations and throughout Puerto Rican women's participation in feminist movements, it would be possible "[t]o find the strength in the knowledge of the past achievements and ideas, and design new direction and actions to withdraw from the path of his-story and continue to develop her-story." However, over twenty years later, Pantoja's call to recover the history

of Puerto Rican women's political activism in migrant communities still remains a challenge to scholars.

This dissertation begins to trace the creation of networks that facilitated Puerto Rican women's emergence as community organizers and political leaders in migrant communities after the mid 1940s in the United States. In particular, it explores the history of the field of social work and social workers' central role in the development of the welfare state in Puerto Rico and the United States as a space where Puerto Rican women developed new political projects centered on social justice throughout the twentieth century. Social work was the field that provided a launching pad for the seemingly limitless career of Pantoja. She embraced the possibilities of professionalization in social work while rejecting many of its traditional aspects. She noted in her autobiography, "I knew I did not want to be a caseworker, since I since I believed caseworkers participated in making people adjust to situations that they should fight against, situations that hurt them or rendered them powerless." Instead, she moved towards the emerging field of community organizing within the field of social work, and not satisfied with working within conventional social welfare institutions, decided instead to work alongside other Puerto Rican migrants to create new Puerto Rican led organizations that would address Puerto Rican poverty, discrimination and inequality.

And while Pantoja's career was exemplary the story of her journey as a Puerto Rican professional woman who migrated to the United States during the 1940s are not unique. Rather, she was one of a growing group of women who experienced the poverty, social upheavals, and changes in Puerto Rico under the colonial rule and embarked on a new journey towards educational opportunities and employment in the United States.

These women, many of them like Pantoja with experience working as teachers and professionals on the island during the populist reforms developed during the period, had already participated and witnessed a major opening in the possibilities for professionalization on the island. When they arrived in the United States they brought with them a taste for the possibilities of political mobilization and organizing already happening on the island. Pantoja herself would note how formative her experience working as a rural school teacher on the island was on her career, because she had been given the freedom to create a collaborative and creative approach to teaching in the community in which she experimented with skills that became useful as she developed her work as a community organizer.⁴⁹⁴ This dissertation traces the history of how through working as teachers and social workers, Puerto Rican women used these professional experiences as a launching pad for new types of work on the island and in the diaspora, developing new and distinctive forms of Puerto Rican women's political organizing.

Pantoja was also not the only Puerto Rican woman and activist who documented the distinctly "feminine leadership" of Puerto Rican political movements in the twentieth century. The field of social work was also a space where a number of other Puerto Rican professional women emerged as historians of their own communities. Contemporaries and foremothers of Pantoja in the field of social work also documented the central role of women's political organizing in social movements over the generations and up until today. I draw upon their insightful recounting of the women's missing role in histories of Puerto Rican state formation and the development of transnational and migrant communities as a main resource in the stories told in this dissertation. They are my guides

⁴⁹⁴ Antonia Pantoja, *Memoir of a Visionary* (Houston, Tex: Arte Público Press, 2002).

in reconstructing this history of women's work and organizing. These histories provide a provocative correction to histories that have overlooked women's political work, tracing the centrality of women's work in fights for social justice, civil rights, decolonization and the rights of migrant citizens.

The lives of these women and the women who preceded them in the field in previous decades also reveals that this feminine leadership was intergenerational and that their work was far ranging. These stories show that Puerto Rican women played central roles in shaping state institutions in both Puerto Rico and the United States and they consistently challenged the limitations on Puerto Rican citizenship that were inscribed in colonial policies under United States rule, from United States intervention until the present day. However, as Pantoja lamented about the New York Puerto Rican women of the post-war period the histories of this organizing have not been well documented. The question I addressed through writing this dissertation was why were these histories missing? How was it that the work and activism of women was left out of most contemporary narratives of Puerto Rican history?

One of the answers that I found was that silences around the history of women, and particularly of Puerto Rican women who were state agents and activists, resulted from the lack of investigation of the history of social welfare and of the development of distinctly colonial forms of social citizenship in Puerto Rico. The erasure of women's work has to do with very way that labor was, and still is, gendered. In imagining or labeling this work as "feminine" it was rendered as superfluous and invisible, and therefore not even seen as labor. Even women's work developing state institutions, because it was envisioned also as a form of caring or reproductive labor, was omitted

from histories of the state. This work was also cast as unimportant because Puerto Rican social workers and community organizers worked specifically with working-class migrants, women and children, the poor, the elderly and sick. They worked overseeing, regulating and managing the intimate lives and labors of marginalized peoples. Their work specifically engaging with questions about poverty also rendered them, like their subjects, to the margins of academic scholarship.

What is most paradoxical about the simultaneous erasure of Puerto Rican social workers and the poor from histories of the Puerto Rican state is their hyper-visibility in scholarship and representations of Puerto Rico from the period. At the same time that the Puerto Rican people became the subject of seemingly endless studies of poverty conditions and what Oscar Lewis would infamously label “the culture of poverty,” the history of social welfare programs and welfare as a site of struggle over social rights and social justice remained hidden from view. Puerto Ricans, in essence, became famous for being poor and dependent and stories about their poverty abounded in popular discourse and culture in the United States. Even as Puerto Rican social workers were recruited to collect the data for such studies, to write many of these reports, the history of their political engagement with the development of poverty knowledge and the construction of the colonial welfare state was glaringly absent from these narratives about poverty, dependency and the dangers of colonialism.

Thus, while Puerto Rican women themselves have insisted on documenting their own history as a part political agents and advocates of social justice and civil rights, these stories have remained largely missing from histories of the Puerto Rican state formation or of Puerto Rican migration to the United States. This dissertation responds to the call of

Puerto Rican activist and organizers to begin reconstituting the hidden history of women's organizing and activism on behalf of the poor and displaced migrant communities. Drawing upon stories like those recounted by Puerto Rican social worker activists like Antonia Pantoja this dissertation recounts a history of Puerto Rican women and welfare that centers on organizing and activism.

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